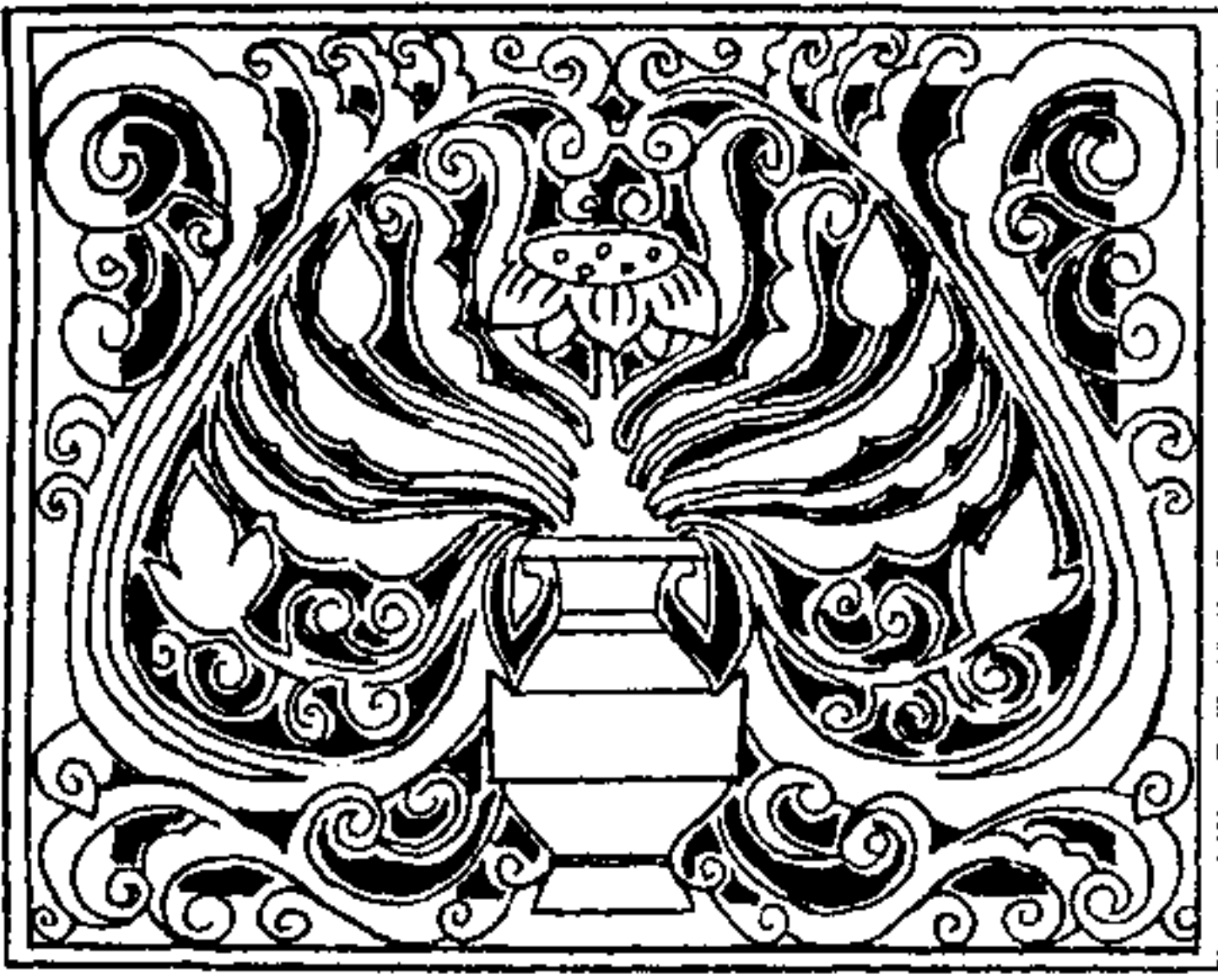




PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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SEPTEMBER 1997

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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 102

SEPTEMBER 1997

No. 9

Divine Wisdom

IMAGE WORSHIP VERSUS SEEING GOD IN ALL

(Sage Kapila to his mother Devahūti)

अर्चादावर्चयेत्तावदीश्वरं मां स्वकर्मकृत्।
यावन्न वेद स्वहृदि सर्वभूतेष्ववस्थितम्॥

A man should, however, worship Me in images, side by side with discharging his duties, which include the love of all beings, until he actually realizes My Presence in himself and in all beings.

आत्मनश्च परस्यापि यः करोत्यन्तरोदरम्।
तस्य भिन्नदृशो मृत्युर्विदधे भयमुल्बणम्॥

As long as man is self-centred and makes an absolute distinction between himself and others (without recognizing the

unity of all in Me, the Inner Pervader), he will be subject to the great fear of Death (including every form of deprivation of self-interest).

अथ मां सर्वभूतेषु भूतात्मानं कृतालयम्।
अर्हयेद्दानमानाभ्यां मैत्र्याभिन्नेन चक्षुषा॥

So, overcoming the separateness of a self-centred life, one should serve all beings with gifts, honour and love, recognizing that such service is really being rendered to Me who reside in all beings as their innermost soul.

—Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 3.29.25–27

Human Woe - I

Tears trickled down the cheeks of the Swami. His eyes filled with tears could hardly see anything in front of him. It was Swami Akhandananda. What was the cause of the Swami's anguish of heart?

Early Life

Swami Akhandananda, known in his premonastic days as Gangadhar Ghatak, was one of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Orthodox in his habits, Gangadhar bathed several times a day, cooked his one day meal all by himself, read the scriptures especially the *Gita*, and practised regular meditation. Coming in contact with the embodiment of spirituality, Gangadhar learnt what spirituality truly meant, for he saw before him in the holy person of his Master divine inebriation of which he had read in books. 'He chews a hundred betel rolls a day, and eats whatever he gets. But his mind is deeply introspective. He goes along the streets of Calcutta seeing houses and chattels, horses and carriages, and everything as full of God! Go and see him one day.' So said Sri Ramakrishna to Gangadhar referring to Narendranath. Gangadhar found in Narendranath the truth of Sri Ramakrishna's assessment verified and thus was laid the foundation of everlasting devotion, veneration and allegiance to Swamiji in the heart of Gangadhar. That Swamiji also held Gangadhar in great love and had high hopes about him is obvious from the fact that Swamiji used to call him Ganges. Ganges is, according to Hindu belief, a river that has been continuously wiping the sins of millions of people, a river that is sanctified by its origin at the holy feet of Vishnu and equally sanctified by finding a place in the matted locks of Shiva, the King of Sannyasins. While the river Ganges, it is said in the *Ramachari-*

tamanasa, was holy because of the company of gods even though for a brief time, a sannyasin is the eternal embodiment of holiness because of his constant contemplation of the divine. Did Swamiji also mean by calling him Ganges that Gangadhar was to wipe away the tears from the face of many during his lifetime and free them from the bondage of many forms of human affliction? Did Swamiji also foresee that in the activities of Gangadhar posterity will find a living demonstration of the ideals placed before humanity by him (Swamiji), which example will serve as a fountain of inspiration? Who can tell for sure?

Gangadhar served the Master during his last days at Cossipore and kept close contact with the monastery at Baranagar especially because of his deeply ingrained love for Swamiji. As it happens in the life of some monks, Gangadhar too was fired with the ideal of leading an unfettered life, moving about like the 'rhinoceros'. There was in him a strong attraction for the Himalayas with all its grandeur. Sri Ramakrishna had told him earlier that one could not have the idea of the Infinite unless one sees the Himalayas or a vast ocean. This was what impelled Gangadhar to visit the Himalayas.

Wandering in the Himalayas

Between 1887 and 1890, Gangadhar thrice wandered across the rugged surface of the Himalayan terrain daring cold and all inconveniences. But even the first sight of the Himalayas filled him with a great longing to revisit this 'Divine King of Mountains'. Regarding Gaurikund which Gangadhar visited, he wrote:

The enchanting scenes of nature I saw, so full of her captivating presence, made me forget completely the sorrows

of this fleeting life. Oh, the beauty and variety of the trees, densely laden with foliage and flowers, twigs and new leaves, rising in massive heaps one above the other; the humming of bees drunken with honey, their bodies covered with pollen; the gentle sound of breeze carrying the fragrance of flowers; the song of numerous birds; the beautiful mountain streams ceaselessly gurgling along in their white, silvery forms, winding and turning in their hurried course, echoing 'Hara, Hara'; the tall trees growing up out of beds of wild flowers; and above all the towering, ice-covered, golden mountains! [Swami Annadananda: *Swami Akhandananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), p. 47]

It was not all beauty and sublimity. Young Gangadhar had varied experiences during his travels in the Himalayas: he came across monks of exceptional calibre who were all-renouncing and devoted to meditation; he had sometimes to travel through dense forests infested with wild animals; sometimes he came across monks who dissuaded him from undertaking his journey all alone; many times he had ample proof that the Master was always guiding him imperceptibly and not unoften the Master revealed himself in person and also spoke to him affectionately.

An incident occurred at Bhatoari on the way to Gangotri which was painful to Gangadhar. Gangadhar came across an ailing monk who was in a helpless condition and nearing death. Suddenly a brahmacharin appeared on the scene and, when requested, carried the monk's belongings to a nearby habitation. By the time it was about three hours past sunset, Gangadhar somehow managed to get the monk on his feet and move just a short distance. The monk collapsed and narrowly escaped falling into a deep gorge. No villager came forward to help any traveller and so there was

no hope. Gangadhar sold his only blanket and hired a porter to carry the ailing monk to a rest-house. That night and the next day Gangadhar nursed the monk enduring many hardships including the curse of the Nagas who had assembled there. The monk however died and Gangadhar performed his last rites. This event showing the great apathy some had towards one in ill-health and desperately in need of help must have certainly left a deep impact on the mind of Gangadhar.

Travels in Tibet

Gangadhar had a longing to visit Tibet too. And this too was a journey filled with many hazards, hardships and uncertainties, though Sri Ramakrishna revealed himself here too on many occasions. Many times he was suspected to be a British spy and the police arrested him. Once he was even placed under lock-up and could get out only with great difficulty and determination to even starve himself to death if need be. On the route to Kailas and Manasarovar, he fell into the hands of a band of outlaws and by sheer presence of mind escaped unhurt. He had to face fierce blizzards at Kailas. And the pleasant part of it was that he came across genuinely spiritual persons who, seeing the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna in Gangadhar's keeping, were transported to the inner world of the spirit and, coming down to the normal plane, showed great eagerness to worship the photograph seeing in it the likeness of Bhagavan Buddha. Gangadhar was happy to be in Tibet because, despite the unpleasant events, it was calm, beautiful, and had an austere atmosphere suitable for spiritual life.

However, here in Tibet as in the Himalayas, he came across an unpleasant situation. Though the Tibetans had great respect for spiritual aspirants yet they had some suspicion that young Gangadhar might be a British spy. Their doubts got confirmed when Gangadhar, who knew the language of the people of Tibet, came to know of the

sufferings and hardships of the common people and spoke of it to the lamas. The lamas did not like it suspecting some ugly motive in this, and placed a sheathed sword on Gangadhar's shoulder warning him to express such concerns only at the risk of losing his life. In spite of this strong warning it was difficult to prevent Gangadhar from expressing the concern on occasions more than one. This time the lamas said that they would cut open his jaws or keep him in lifelong imprisonment if he persisted. It is shocking that the lamas not only did not feel for the poor common man but even took such stern steps to curb the expression of genuine feelings of Gangadhar.

It was one of Swamiji's letters that brought Gangadhar down to the plains. In that letter Swamiji expressed a great desire to go to the Himalayas with Gangadhar and practise austerity. Gangadhar abandoning his original plan to proceed to Central Asia came to Ghazipur at the call of the beloved Swami Vivekananda.

Wandering in the Company of Swamiji

Back to Calcutta they came from Ghazipur and at Baranagar in the first week of July 1890, Gangadhar took the monastic vows with Swamiji acting as the *acharya* and Swamiji named him Akhandananda in recognition of his unbroken continence. Akhandananda thereafter set out again with Swami Vivekananda on a pilgrimage to the Himalayas and enjoyed five delightful months in his company. They had a number of experiences and at one time as many as seven monks were together, making the place a second Baranagar monastery. One particular incident is worthy of recalling:

They were then going to Almora en route to Badrinarayan. One day Swamiji told Swami Akhandananda to follow the footpath and himself went through the woods. After waiting on the other side for some time, Akhandananda decided to find why Swamiji was so late in coming. There,

to his astonishment, he saw the Master and Swamiji embracing each other. Struck by wonder and joy he waited with bated breath. Swamiji had many other spiritual experiences including the realization that the macrocosm and the microcosm are strung together on the same string.

The fatigue of the journey and the cold caused illness in one or the other of the brothers and this stood in the way of *tapasya*. So, Swamiji, intending to remain alone, left Akhandananda causing him the pain of separation so much so he told Swamiji, 'It was for your sake that I abandoned my plan to visit Central Asia and now you leave me!' But Swamiji's earnest reply was: 'You see, the company of brothers is a hindrance to my *tapasya*. One or another may fall ill. I cannot do my sadhana unless I sever the golden chain that binds me to you. I shall now live alone, and nobody shall know of my whereabouts.' This explanation satisfied Swami Akhandananda who, however, responded by saying, '...you may be sure that if I fail to find you, though you be in the nether world, then Gangadhar is not my name'. Sure enough, Gangadhar followed in the footsteps of Swamiji and despite many hardships and immense danger to his very life, located Swamiji at Mandvi. Such was the reverence and love with which Akhandananda looked upon his beloved leader and it very certainly revealed the tenacity with which he was to follow the ideals of Swamiji.

Exposed to human woes was Swami Akhandananda, but he was either captivated by the grandeur of the Himalayas or deeply engrossed in the pursuit of Swamiji, his beloved leader, unmindful of even his safety. In the next two issues we will see how the tender Buddha-like heart of Swami Akhandananda reacted to repeated and keener exposure to human affliction and brought out the lion in him.

(to be continued)

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Thiruvananthapuram: A Report

G. SANKARA MENON

We are grateful to Swami Sakrananada, Head of Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama at Thiruvananthapuram, for giving us this report of the ashrama's major activities and its interaction with people prepared by Sri G. Sankara Menon, a Retired Judge, for publication in Prabuddha Bharata.

In giving an account of the major activities of this Ashrama and its interaction with the people, it may not be out of place—indeed, it should be delightful reading to Ramakrishna devotees the world over—to narrate briefly the story of its coming into being and of its growth over the years. This report therefore traces the growth of this institution from the very beginning.

The message of Sri Ramakrishna was brought to Thiruvananthapuram (until recently misspelt and mispronounced Trivandrum) for the first time by Swami Vivekananda himself, when, during the close of his prolonged wanderings, he came here in the December of 1892 and stayed for nine days as the guest of Professor K. Sundararama Iyer. A detailed account of that stay is given in the published reminiscences of the Professor and of his son K.S. Ramaswami Sastri¹. It was from here that Swamiji went to Kanyakumari and spent three days in meditation on the 'last bit of Indian rock', deriving therefrom the inspiration for his future work: the material and spiritual regeneration of his motherland and the broadcasting of her invaluable scriptural

treasures, the truth of which his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, demonstrated in his unique life. But, while he was here, Swamiji kept an unusually low profile and made no conscious attempt to spread his Master's message. In fact, he excused himself when requested by his host to give a public lecture.

Twelve years later, Swami Ramakrishnananda, Sri Ramakrishna's apostle to South India and then the President of the Madras (now Chennai) Math, visited Thiruvananthapuram. Staying here for a month, he delivered four public lectures, held regular classes on the *Gita* and gave several interviews. Following his visit, a Vedanta Society was formed here under the leadership of Dr. Raman Tampi, a medical officer who eventually rose in position to hold the highest post in the Medical Department. In response to the invitation of the Vedanta Society, Swami Nirmalananda, who, with his headquarters at Bangalore, was then actively spreading the message of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in southwest India, visited Thiruvananthapuram in September 1911. It was then that the idea of establishing an Ashrama here was first mooted. A subscription list was forthwith opened by Swami Nirmalananda, himself subscribing his own name and making a token donation of one rupee on the spot.

1. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), pp. 57–70 and 98–101.

However, it took four long years to get a suitable site for the Ashrama, and it came about as though through the will of Sri Ramakrishna. One Arunachalam Pillai, a retired Post Master, owning extensive lands at Nettayam, a rural area about eight kilometres to the northeast of the town, generously agreed to donate five acres of land out of his property for the purpose of establishing the Ashrama. The gift deed was registered on 23 December 1915 and the foundation was laid by His Holiness Swami Brahmananda, the first President of the Ramakrishna Order, on 9 December 1916. For various reasons, the construction works of the Ashrama could be completed only by 1924. Since Swami Brahmananda had entered *mahasamadhi* before then, the installation ceremony in the beautiful shrine was performed by Swami Nirmalananda himself on 7 March 1924.

Built on a beautiful hill out of dressed and semi-dressed granite, this Ashrama, by virtue of its ideal situation and solidity and elegance of construction, is unique among the Sri Ramakrishna Ashramas in India. Its western veranda with a semi-circular porch commands a wide and beautiful perspective. Its roof is supported by twelve massive, fluted columns, each carved out of a single piece of granite. Later, some two and a half acres of land was also obtained from the same landlord and additional constructions were made.

With the spread of the unique message of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and the opening of centres in Kerala (which then comprised the princely states of Travancore and Cochin and the Malabar district of Madras Presidency), the number of devotees in this region steadily increased. Many came for-



*Ramakrishna Ashrama at Nettayam:
Foundation stone laid on 9 December 1916 by Revered Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj
Inaugurated on 7 March 1924 by Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj*

ward to receive initiation into spiritual life and some even to embrace monasticism. Thus, with the inauguration of the Ashrama at Nettayam, monks became available for attending to the daily worship and other affairs of the Ashrama. Swami Nirmalananda, with his headquarters at first at Bangalore and later at Ottappalam in Malabar, exercised overall supervision. He used to visit and stay in the Ashrama from time to time and was invariably present during the annual celebrations connected with the birth of Sri Ramakrishna. A large number of people from the surrounding areas and the town used to participate in these celebrations. The solicitude which the Ashramites showed for the welfare and uplift of the depressed classes attracted them to the Ashrama and went a long way in abolishing the evils of untouchability in this area. During the birthday celebrations of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, there used to be held *daridra-nārāyaṇa pūjā* (worship of the poor as God through sumptuous feeding) on a very large scale, personally supervised by the Swami. On those occasions, large numbers of these so-called untouchables would come and, besides partaking of the *prasād*, would present cultural programmes. On other occasions, devotees from the town would come to meet and hear Swami Nirmalananda while he was present. On other visits, the devotees spent some time or even days in peace, prayer and meditation. This state of affairs continued till the passing away of Swami Nirmalananda in April 1938. Thereafter, the activities of the Ashrama sunk into a state of quiescence for a period.

In 1937, under the inspiration of Swami Nirmalananda, a purely secular organization called 'Narendra Mission' was formed here with Dr. Raman Tampi and a few other prominent devotees as members, for the purpose of carrying on charitable and philanthropic works among the masses. The Narendra Mission purchased a small plot of

land with a decrepit building with just two rooms and verandas at Sasthamangalam in the eastern part of the town. Soon after, the work relating to the religious magazine, *Prabuddha Keralam*, in Malayalam (the language spoken in Kerala), published by the Ramakrishna Mission, was carried on in the larger room, where stayed also the Swami in charge of the publication. Dr. Raman Tampi, who had by then retired from service, began to use the front veranda for some time daily to render free medical aid and advice to financially needy patients. Towards the end of August 1939, a dispensary under the name 'Narendra Mission Charitable Dispensary' was formally opened here, putting to use the smaller room and the two verandas, with Dr. Raman Tampi lending his free services as the Chief Medical Officer and a new-fledged medical hand, Dr. K. Kesavan Nair (who unfortunately died recently, serving the institution almost till the last), as his able assistant.

Before long, the members of the Narendra Mission came to feel that the objectives of the Ramakrishna Movement could be better secured if the Ashrama and the Dispensary were taken over and managed by the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur. Therefore, the members wrote to the authorities of the Belur Math to that effect and requested them to send from the Headquarters at Belur a monk for this purpose, preferring a person who could speak in the language of the local people. Pursuant to this, Swami Tapasyananda came over here in early 1940 and took charge of both these institutions—the Ashrama and the Dispensary. With that the Narendra Mission dissolved into the world renowned Ramakrishna Order.

Swami Tapasyananda's ministry, extending over three decades, brought a phenomenal growth in both the charitable and spiritual dispensations of the Centre.

Through the dedicated and painstaking effort, coupled with the respect and influence his innate qualities commanded, Swami Tapasyananda transformed the small dispensary in a ramshackle shed into a full-fledged hospital with modern amenities and suitable buildings spread out over 1.56 hectares of land.

He accommodated himself in the larger of the two rooms, which had by then been vacated by the *Prabuddha Keralam* and its publisher, and with the help of a donation, first added a prayer hall and a shrine room to the old building. With the installation of Sri Ramakrishna's picture in the shrine room and the commencement of daily prayer and worship, this venue blossomed into an extension centre of the main Ashrama at Nettayam.

Afterwards, with the help of another substantial donation, a new building named 'Kalyani Pillai Memorial' was put up in the then available space on the north. The facility this provided for opening a proper outpatient (O.P.) section, and the permission given by the government to specialist doctors in government service to render service in the hospital without detriment to their official duties, set the stage for a marked and rapid growth of the institution. In due course, the Swami purchased or acquired through government some adjacent lands on the south and the north, and constructed buildings thereon, securing the necessary funds through various sources. By the opening of a maternity ward with ten beds in a temporary shed in the newly purchased land on the south in 1944, the dispensary took the first step to raise itself to the status of a hospital. This shed was replaced by a better building later. In due course, several buildings were put up in the newly acquired lands on both sides to meet the increasing requirements occasioned by the steady expansion. Thus, by the time Swami Tapasy-

ananda left Thiruvananthapuram in June 1971 (for shouldering the responsibilities in Madras Math), the Hospital came to provide the following facilities: (1) O.P. section with both morning and evening sessions, (2) In-patients' wards with 200 beds (116 free and 84 paying), (3) Maternity and Child Welfare (20 maternity beds), (4) Psychiatry Ward with arrangement for shock therapy, (5) A well-equipped Operation Theatre, (6) Weekly or bi-weekly Clinics in E.N.T., Dentistry, and Orthopaedics, (7) Eye Clinic, (8) A well-equipped Clinical Laboratory, (9) X-Ray, (10) Cardiography, and (11) Diathermy. A Nursing School was started in 1962. Besides these, an Ayurvedic dispensary was being conducted at Nettayam under the supervision of the Nettayam Ashrama.

In the matter of spiritual ministration, during the early years, Swami Tapasyananda used to organize *bhajan* parties by school children every week and visit houses in different parts of the town, both for spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna and for collecting funds. These visits proved fruitful in both respects. From 1952, the Swami began to conduct *Gita* classes at the Sasthamangalam Centre and hold spiritual discourses elsewhere in the city and in outlying places. The Nettayam Ashrama continued to be the venue of all celebrations on special occasions and served also as a place for periodic retreat for devotees. Through these activities, Swami Tapasyananda was able to widen the circle of devotees considerably. Dr. Raman Tampi, throughout his life, continued to remain the most ardent devotee and the main supporter of the Ashrama.

After Swami Tapasyananda, the Presidentship was held in succession by Swamis Anantatmananda, Golokananda and Sri-nathananda. The present incumbent, Swami Sakrananda, took over in the middle of Au-

gust 1987. Soon after Swami Tapasyananda left, a setback occurred in the affairs of the Hospital owing to the government suddenly withdrawing the permission they had earlier given to specialists in government service to work here. However, the Hospital managed to tide over the situation and made its own arrangements to get the services of specialists. It thus succeeded in maintaining the course of growth and expansion.

One notable addition during this period was the construction of the Polyclinic building in 1974, to which site the entire O.P. department was transferred, making available the Kalyani Pillai Memorial Building for extension of the office. Among other major constructions was the addition of more floors to the existing buildings, particularly the annexe in the extreme north. Another important work was the total renovation and restructuring of the old building housing the shrine and prayer hall, carried out in 1978 through the munificence of a benefac-

tor. By the removal of partitions, the prayer hall was enlarged. The whole building was provided with mosaic flooring and a matching ceiling. The shrine room was made more attractive and the picture of Sri Ramakrishna was provided with a lotus-shaped stucco throne and a canopy above. The enlargement of the prayer hall has enabled a much larger number of people to attend the discourses held there. However, the assemblage sometimes becomes so large as to overflow into the courtyard outside.

In 1983, the Hospital started a Rural Medical Service by organizing a Mobile Unit and commenced serving two villages. In 1986, a new project called the Sri Ramakrishna Rural Health Service Project was started under the Private Voluntary Organization Health (PVOH) Scheme of the Government of India which provided a substantial grant for a specific period. The Scheme envisaged the setting up of Mini Health Centres (MHC) at village level, a referral Rural



Polyclinic and Out-patient section in June 1974

Health Centre (RHC) and a Base Hospital. This project was carried out in five villages. The period of the Central Government grant expired in September 1990. Thereafter, the Ashrama is struggling hard to find the resources for continuing the scheme. At present there are six MHCs, one of which works both as MHC and RHC. The Base Hospital at Sasthamangalam (in the Annexe building) has 12 cabins.

Under the Innovative Scheme aided by the CAPART, the Ashrama provided 520 latrines and dug 155 wells during 1988-89 and 1989-90. Further, financial assistance was extended to poor villagers to thatch their huts. During 1988-89, when the second year Nursing students went for community nursing to the Rural Health Centres, they distributed cash, food and cloth collected by them to the poor and the needy of those areas. For spreading health education among the villagers, the Ashrama arranged group and mass meetings, exhibitions, film shows and orientation camps.

The Hospital now provides specialized modern medical treatment. The general facilities now available are: (1) An Indoor Hospital with 275 beds, (2) An Outdoor Polyclinic, (3) Maternity and Child Welfare Departments, (4) Two fully equipped Operation Theatres, (5) Two X-Ray Plants, (6) Electrocardiography, (7) An Intensive Care Unit with two beds, (8) Clinical, Biochemical, Bacteriological and Histopathological Laboratories, (9) Ultra-sound Scanning, (10) A 24-

hour Casualty Section, and (11) Rural Health Service. There is also the Ayurvedic Dispensary and a Clinic occasionally for sick children and mothers at the Rural Health Centres.

All the charitable and philanthropic activities conducted by the Ashrama are inspired by the ideal of service of God in man advocated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. At a time when medical facilities were very scarce in this locality, this institution proved to be a blessing to the people here and in the surrounding rural areas. Even after considerable enhancement in medical facilities in the locality, this Hospital continues to be of immense help, particularly to the middle and lower economy classes. Out of 275 beds the Hospital provides, 116 are free, with free diet and free



Nursing School and Hostel

attention by the doctors and nurses. Medicines are supplied to the patients at concessional rates and, in deserving cases, completely free. The rush in the O.P. and I.P. sections is very much on the increase as the patients receive here a very homely atmosphere and care.

Coming to the purely spiritual and cultural activities, the Sasthamangalam Centre now regularly conducts spiritual discourses in the evenings on three days of the week. Besides these, periodic discourses on Vedantic texts by competent scholars extending over a few days, either in the evenings or both in the mornings and evenings, are also arranged.

All important festivals like the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, as well as Gurupurnima, Durga Puja, and the like are celebrated mainly at the Nettayam Ashrama. The functions there come to an end with *bhajan* and *arati* at noon. This is followed by the distribution of *prasad*. The functions in the evening are held at Sasthamangalam. Sometimes on special occasions (like the Centenary of Swami Vivekananda's appearance at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago), elaborate programmes are arranged in collaboration with like-minded organizations like the Vivekananda Kendra, choosing different places for the conduct of different programmes. In order to ensure a greater involvement of children and youth, competitions on subjects relating to the life and message of Swamiji are usually included in such programmes and prizes are given away.

As to the functions held at Nettayam and Sasthamangalam, the response from the public is good and encouraging in regard to some of these, though not up to our expectations in certain others. The coming up of several other religious organizations, the in-

fluence of the television and other media which attract many, particularly the youth, the prevailing general apathy towards matters spiritual and the unavoidable preoccupations due to the exigencies of modern life seem to be the reasons for the lack of adequate response to some of the programmes.

There is a bookstall at the Sasthamangalam Centre where many publications of the Order are available for sale. The demand for the Mission's publications is very encouraging.

The Extension Centre at Sasthamangalam is now virtually an Ashrama as daily worship attended by *bhajan* is carried on in the shrine and as many as five monks (including the President) and three brahmacharins stay here. At the Nettayam Ashrama, on the other hand, there are only two monks. Nevertheless, the Nettayam Ashrama continues to be the main Ashrama of Thiruvananthapuram. Besides the fact that the main functions during important celebrations are held at Nettayam, it is also there that the President of the Order and other dignitaries reside whenever they visit this place sanctified by Swami Brahmananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda. It is also a haven of peace for those who wish to spend some time or a few days in prayer and meditation—far from the madding crowd and in a holy atmosphere. □

Pray to God thus: 'O Lord, give me faith and devotion, knowledge and discrimination. See that I do not get entangled in the snares of the world-bewitching Maya.' When you pray, pray with all your heart and soul. When you meditate, try to be one with God, to have the consciousness of unity and identity. One should by all means practise like this.

—Swami Shivananda, *For Seekers of God*, p. 55

स्वागतसुमाञ्जलिः

A Floral Tribute of Welcome *

(श्रीमद्विवेकानन्दयतीन्द्रस्य मातृदेशपुनरागमनशतवार्षिकोत्सवशुभावसरे श्रीरामकृष्णभावप्रचार परिषदा आयोजितायां रथयात्रायां तिरुपतिपुरवासिभिः जनैः समर्पितः।)

(Offered by the residents of Tirupati during the Chariot Procession organized by Sri Ramakrishna Bhava Prachar Parishad on the holy occasion of the Centenary of the return of Swami Vivekananda, the king of sannyasins, to his motherland.)

ब्रह्मनिष्ठागरिष्ठाय यतिश्रेष्ठाय धीमते। स्वागतं स्वामिने श्रीमद्विवेकानन्दयोगिने॥१॥

Welcome to Srimat Swami Vivekananda, the Yogin!

The best among the ascetics, the greatest among those steadfast in Brahman and the one endowed with wisdom. (1)

सनातनस्य धर्मस्य वेदमूलस्य वैभवम्। जगद्व्याप्तं कृतं येन तस्मै सुस्वागताञ्जलिः॥२॥

An offering of hearty welcome to him who made known to the whole world

The glory of the Eternal Religion rooted in the Vedas. (2)

श्रीरामकृष्णकृपया जातो ज्ञाननिधिर्भवान्। वेदवेदान्तसिद्धान्ता विश्वव्याप्ताः कृतास्त्वया॥३॥

Thou, born out of the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, art the embodiment of Knowledge.

By thee was broadcast worldwide the conclusions of the Vedas and the Vedanta. (3)

तव प्रवचनं श्रुत्वा सर्वे पाश्चात्यपण्डिताः। विस्मयं परमं प्राप्ता यतिराज! नमोऽस्तु ते॥४॥

Salutations to thee! O King among the ascetics! on hearing whose exposition

The intelligentsia in the West were greatly wonder-struck. (4)

चिकागोनगरे विश्वमतवेद्यां त्वया कृतः। वेदान्तडिण्डिमारावः श्रूयतेऽद्यापि हे विभो॥५॥

Even today, the world over, is heard sounding like drum beats

That Vedantic message delivered by you at the Chicago World Parliament of Religions. (5)

आर्षविज्ञानकेन्द्रस्य मातृदेशस्य गौरवम्। संवर्धितं त्वया लोके नमस्ते यतिपुङ्गव॥६॥

Salutations to thee! O the greatest among the ascetics! by whom was enhanced in the world

The glory of our motherland, the centre of spirituality. (6)

दिव्यत्वं सर्वभूतेषु निगूढं वर्तते भुवि। तस्य व्यक्तीकृतिः कार्येत्युक्तं सत्यं त्वया गुरो॥७॥

Divinity lies potentially in all beings in the world,

That, one should manifest—This truth was uttered by you, O Teacher! (7)

त्वया सन्दर्शितः पन्थाः सर्वलोकशुभावहः। सर्वे मुक्तिं गमिष्यन्ति नूनं तदनुयायिनः॥८॥

Traversing the path shown by you bestows good on the world,

Indeed, all those who follow that path, will attain to liberation. (8)

अहो! तिरुपतिक्षेत्रवासिनां भाग्यसञ्चयः। यैरद्याधिगतं श्रीमद्विवेकानन्ददर्शनम्॥९॥

Hark! It is the accumulated merit of the residents of Tirupati

Because of which today was obtained the vision of Srimat Vivekananda. (9)

विवेकानन्दयतिना धर्मचक्रः प्रवर्तितः। श्रीनिवासस्य कृपया निर्विघ्नं यातु सर्वतः॥१०॥

May the Wheel of Dharma set rolling by Vivekananda, the ascetic,

Proceed everywhere unimpeded by the grace of Lord Srinivasa. (10)

तिरुपति

Tirupati

१-५-१९९७

1-5-1997

इति तिरुपतिपुरवासिनः।

—The residents of Tirupati

रचना : समुद्राल लक्ष्मणय्य

(Composed by Samudral Lakshmanayya)

* On 1 May 1997, the Vivekananda Ratha Yatra was flagged off at Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh, to reach Icchapuram on 31 May 1997. There was a public meeting at Tirupati on 1 May 1997 wherein the above address, composed by Sri Samudral Lakshmanayya, Secretary, Dharma Prachar Parishad, Tirumala Tirupati Devasathanam, was presented in memory of Swami Vivekananda to Swami Tattwabodhanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math, Visakhapatnam, and the President of Sri Ramakrishna Bhava Prachar Parishad.

Swami Brahmananda

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

This forms the first of a series of articles by Swami Chetanananda on the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna which is to form part of his book 'God Lived With Them' The Swami is the spiritual leader of Vedanta Society of St. Louis, Missouri.

It is extremely painful for a spiritual person who thinks constantly of God to talk or hear about mundane things. Once a novelist said to Sri Ramakrishna that the duties of a man were 'eating, sleeping, and having sex.' Sri Ramakrishna scolded him, telling him that he was impudent: 'What you do day and night comes out through your mouth. A man belches what he eats. If he eats radish, he belches radish.' Ramakrishna would feel a burning sensation on his lips whenever he had to talk with worldly people. He panted for companions with whom he could talk about God.

One day Ramakrishna fervently prayed to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, it is my desire that a boy with sincere love for God should always remain with me. Give me such a boy.' A few days later, sitting under the banyan tree at Dakshineswar, he had a vision of a boy. He told this to his nephew Hriday, who immediately explained its significance with joy: 'Uncle, you will have a child.' 'What do you mean?' said Ramakrishna with surprise: 'I look upon all women as my mother. How can I have a son?'

Sri Ramakrishna had a second vision: 'Just a few days before Rakhal's coming I saw Mother putting a child into my lap and saying, "This is your son." I shuddered at the thought and asked her in surprise, "What do you mean? I too have a son?" Then she explained with a smile that it would be a spiritual child, and I was comforted. Shortly after this vision Rakhal came, and I at once recognized him as the boy presented

by the Divine Mother.'

Sometime in the middle of 1881, Sri Ramakrishna had another vision. He saw two boys dancing on a full-blown lotus floating on the Ganges. One of the boys was Krishna and the other was the same boy whom the Mother had previously placed on his lap in a vision. That very day Rakhal, crossing the Ganges, came to Dakshineswar from Konnagar; the Master immediately recognized him as his spiritual son.

Rakhal Chandra Ghosh was born on Tuesday, 21 January 1863, at Sikra Kulin-gram, a village sixty miles northeast of Calcutta; he was brought up in rural Bengal. His father, Anandamohan Ghosh, was a wealthy landlord, who also made a good deal of money trading salt and mustard seed. His mother, Kailaskamini, was devoted to Krishna, so she named her son Rakhal (literally 'cowherd boy,' a playmate of Krishna). When Rakhal was five years old, his mother died while giving birth to quadruplets. To maintain the household and to raise Rakhal, Anandamohan married Hemangini Sen, a daughter of Shyamal Sen of Calcutta. She was a loving young woman and cared for Rakhal as if he were her own son.

Rakhal was a handsome, energetic young boy. He was good at sports, gardening, and fishing. His early academic career was excellent. He was fond of devotional singing. When the village minstrel would sing kirtan, he would listen with rapt attention and try to learn the songs. From his childhood Rakhal was quiet by nature and

deeply religious. As a young boy, he would practise meditation in the Kali temple, and during Durga Puja he would sit behind the priest and meditate like a yogi.

In 1875 when Rakhal was twelve, Anandamohan took him to Calcutta for his higher education. He was admitted to the Training Academy and later the Metropolitan School, and stayed with his stepmother's family. Rakhal met Narendranath Datta in a nearby gymnasium. They became close friends as they were the same age and had a similar religious inclination. As a member of the Brahmo Samaj, Narendra was committed to belief in a formless God with attributes, and thus did not believe in Hindu gods. In his enthusiasm he persuaded Rakhal to embrace the Brahmo creed though Rakhal was by nature devotional and contemplative. He began to neglect his schoolwork and gradually lost all other worldly interests. Anandamohan was disturbed when he heard of Rakhal's spiritual inclination. To divert his son's mind from God to the world, he arranged Rakhal's marriage. Without any enthusiasm, Rakhal obediently accepted his father's decision.

In the middle of 1881 Rakhal married Vishweshwari Mitra, an eleven-year-old sister of Manomohan Mitra, who was a devotee of Ramakrishna. Ironically, it was his bride's brother who took Rakhal to Ramakrishna in June or July 1881, and later made it possible for him to renounce the world. As soon as the Master saw Rakhal, he told Manomohan with a smile, 'A wonderful receptacle!' Then the Master asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Rakhal Chandra Ghosh.' Hearing the word 'Rakhal,' the Master went into ecstasy and softly uttered: 'That name! Rakhal — the cowherd boy of Vrindaban!' After regaining partial consciousness, the Master treated him as his own and at last said endearingly, 'Come again.'

During one of his visits to Dakshineswar in 1881, Rakhal had a spiritual expe-

rience. Ramakrishna later recalled: 'Rakhal had his first religious ecstasy while sitting here [in his room] massaging my feet. A Bhagavata scholar had been expounding the sacred book in the room. As Rakhal listened to his words, he shuddered every now and then. Then he became altogether still. His second ecstasy was at Balaram Bose's house. In that state he could not keep himself sitting upright; he lay flat on the floor. Rakhal belongs to the realm of the Personal God. He leaves the place if one talks about the Impersonal.'

Because Rakhal believed in the personal aspect of God, when he went to the Kali or Krishna temples with the Master, he would bow down to the deities; this was against the Brahmo creed. One day Narendra observed this and took him to task because Rakhal's action was in violation of his pledge. Rakhal had a gentle nature, so rather than argue with Narendra he began to avoid him. Knowing Rakhal's predicament, the Master said to Narendra: 'Please do not intimidate Rakhal. He is afraid of you. He now believes in God with form. How are you going to change him? Everyone cannot realize the formless aspect of God at the very beginning.' From then on, Narendra, a true lover of freedom, never interfered with the new direction of Rakhal's religious attitude. They remained close friends until the end of their lives.

In the beginning Rakhal visited the Master now and then; later he began staying at Dakshineswar. His father objected to this, telling him to concentrate on his studies. When he found that Rakhal did not listen, he became angry and put his son under lock and key. There is a saying: 'The more love is obstructed, the more intense it becomes'; lonely, home-bound Rakhal longed for the Master. On his part Ramakrishna worried about Rakhal, and he went to the temple and prayed: 'Mother, my heart is breaking for Rakhal. Please bring him back to Dakshineswar.'

The Divine Mother answered his prayer. One day while Anandamohan was absorbed in looking over some legal documents, Rakhal quietly left the room and then ran to Dakshineswar. Anandamohan knew where Rakhal had gone, but could not do anything for a few days since he was busy with a lawsuit. Although there was little chance of winning that case, Anandamohan did win. He felt that his victory was due to his son's virtue and the blessings of Ramakrishna. He went to Dakshineswar to see his son, as well as to see the saint there. Rakhal was scared when he saw his father in the distance, but the Master reassured him: 'Why are you frightened? Parents are living gods. As soon as your father arrives, bow down to him respectfully. If the Divine Mother wishes, everything will be favourable.'

When Anandamohan arrived, Ramakrishna gave him a hearty welcome and Rakhal humbly bowed down to him, which melted his father's heart. The Master praised Rakhal: 'Ah, what a nice character Rakhal has developed! Look at his face and every now and then you will notice his lips moving. Inwardly he repeats the name of God, and so his lips move. Youngsters like him belong to the class of the ever-perfect. They are born with God-consciousness.... Ah, what a sweet nature Rakhal has nowadays! And why shouldn't it be so? If the yam is a good one, its shoots also become good. Like father, like son.' Anandamohan was overjoyed listening to Ramakrishna's spiritual talk and the praise of his son. Moreover, he noticed that some lawyers and deputy magistrates were among Ramakrishna's visitors; he was eager to get acquainted with them to advance his personal interests. Anandamohan returned home without raising much objection to his son's living with the Master, but asked him to send Rakhal home now and then.

'As for the family of Rakhal's wife,' the Master said later, 'they raised no objection

—because the ladies used to come here very often. Soon after Rakhal first came here, his mother-in-law [Shyama Sundari] brought Vishweshwari, his wife. I wanted to see if she would stand in the way of Rakhal's devotion to God. I examined her physical features minutely and saw that there was no cause for fear. She represented an auspicious aspect of the divine Shakti. I sent word to the nahabat [i.e., to Sarada Devi] to give her a rupee and unveil Vishweshwari's face.' (This is the traditional ceremony by which a mother-in-law welcomes her daughter-in-law. Since Rakhal was the spiritual son of Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi, Vishweshwari became their daughter-in-law.)

Living with Sri Ramakrishna

Ramakrishna behaved towards Rakhal as a mother to her child; Rakhal acted like a little child rather than a boy of eighteen. It was a mystical relationship beyond human comprehension. M. recorded on 29 March 1883 in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

Rakhal was not feeling well. The Master was greatly worried about him and said to the devotees: 'You see, Rakhal is not well. Will soda-water help him? What am I to do now? Rakhal, please take the prasad from the Jagannath temple.'

Even as he spoke these words the Master underwent a strange transformation. He looked at Rakhal with the infinite tenderness of a mother and affectionately uttered the name of Govinda [a name of Krishna]. Did he see in Rakhal the manifestation of God Himself? The disciple was a young boy of pure heart who had renounced all attraction to lust and greed. And Sri Ramakrishna was intoxicated day and night with love of God. At the sight of Rakhal his eyes expressed the tender feelings of a mother, a love like that which had filled the heart of Mother Yasoda at the sight of the Baby Krishna. The devotees gazed at the Mas-

ter in wonder as he went into deep samadhi.

Later Ramakrishna recalled: 'In those days, Rakhal had the nature of a child of three or four. He treated me just like a mother. He would keep running to me and sitting on my lap. He wouldn't move a step from this place. He never thought of going home. I forced him to, from time to time, lest his father should forbid his coming here altogether.... Sometimes I fed him and played with him to keep him happy. Often I'd lift him to my shoulders.' On one occasion the Master was so struck with his simplicity that he burst into tears as he said: 'You are so simple! Ah, who will look after you after I am gone.'

A real guru acts in two roles — loving mother as well as chastising father — to train his disciple. The Master did not spoil his spiritual son. 'When he did anything wrong,' said Ramakrishna, 'I scolded him. One day he took butter from the temple prasad and ate it without waiting for me. 'How greedy you are,' I said. 'You ought to have learnt, from being here, to control yourself!' He shrank into himself with fear and never did that again.'

One day Rakhal was very hungry and mentioned it to the Master. There was no food in his room, so the Master went to the Ganges and called loudly: 'Hello, Gaurdasi! Please come. My Rakhal is hungry.' After a short while Gauri-ma and Balaram arrived at Dakshineswar by boat with *rasagollas* (cheese balls soaked in sweet syrup). Immediately the Master called: 'Come, Rakhal! They have brought *rasagollas*. Come and eat. Didn't you say you were hungry?' Embarrassed, Rakhal blurted out: 'Sir, why are you talking about my hunger in front of others?' 'What does it matter?' said the Master. 'Since you are hungry, you should eat. What is the harm in saying so?'

Once Rakhal found a coin on the street. Out of kindness he picked it up and gave it

to a beggar. As a child finds joy in telling his mother everything, so it was Rakhal's nature to inform the Master of everything. When the Master heard what Rakhal had done, he reprimanded him: 'Why would a person who does not eat fish go to the fish market? If you did not need money, why did you touch it?' What wonderful logic! The Master wanted his spiritual son to be free from lust and greed, the two great obstacles in spiritual life.

One early afternoon Rakhal arrived from Calcutta and found the Master alone, resting on his bed. He asked Rakhal to sit on the bed and massage his feet. At first Rakhal was reluctant, but the Master insisted, saying: 'Look, there is a tangible result from serving a holy man.' Soon after he began massaging the Master's feet, he saw the Divine Mother, in the form of a girl of seven or eight, circle the Master's bed a few times and then enter into his body. This vision overwhelmed Rakhal. The Master then said to Rakhal with a smile: 'Did you see the result of serving a holy man?'

On 22 July 1883, while rubbing oil on the Master's body on the semicircular veranda, Rakhal requested from him spiritual experiences which other devotees used to have. But the Master ignored his demand. When Rakhal persisted, the Master scolded him harshly. In a temper tantrum, Rakhal threw away the oil cup and stalked off with the intention of never returning. Before he got past Jadu Mallick's garden house, his feet suddenly became numb and he was forced to sit helplessly on the ground. The Master sent his nephew Ramlal to bring him back. The all-forgiving Master said to Rakhal: 'Look, could you go? I drew a boundary line there.'

That afternoon, Rakhal and M. were in the Master's room. They heard Ramakrishna talking with the Divine Mother: 'O Mother, why hast Thou given him only a particle?' After a brief pause, he added: 'I understand it, Mother. That little bit will be

enough for him and will serve Thy purpose. That little bit will enable him to teach people.' M. felt that the Master was transmitting spiritual powers to his disciple, and he recorded: 'Sri Ramakrishna was still in a state of partial consciousness when he said to Rakhal: "You were angry with me, weren't you? Do you know why I made you angry? There was a reason. Only then would the medicine work. The surgeon first brings an abscess to a head. Only then does he apply a herb so that it may burst and dry up."'

A couple of evenings later, Rakhal saw the Master walking towards the Kali temple, and he followed him. Ramakrishna entered the temple, but Rakhal sat for meditation in the *natmandir* [the hall in front of the Mother's temple]. After a while he suddenly saw a brilliant light, like that of a million suns, rushing towards him from the shrine of the Divine Mother. He was frightened and ran to the Master's room.

A little later Ramakrishna returned from the shrine and saw Rakhal. 'Hello!' asked the Master, 'Did you sit for meditation this evening?' 'Yes, I did,' answered Rakhal. He then related what had happened. The Master told him: 'You complain that you don't experience anything. You ask, "What is the use of practising meditation?" So why did you run away when you had an experience?'

Spiritual life is not always easy. It has many ups and downs. Rakhal had to pass through various ordeals and difficulties. He later recalled:

One morning I was meditating in the Kali temple. I could not concentrate my mind. This made me very sad. I said to myself: 'I have been living here so long, yet I have not achieved anything. What is the use of staying here then? Forget it! I am not going to say anything about it to the Master. If this depressed condition continues another two or three days, I shall return home. There my mind will be oc-

cupied with different things.' Having decided this in the shrine, I returned to the Master's room. The Master was then walking on the veranda. Seeing me, he also entered the room. It was customary after returning from the shrine to salute the Master and then eat a light breakfast. As soon as I saluted the Master, he said: 'Look, when you returned from the shrine, I saw that your mind seemed to be covered with a thick net.' I realized that he knew everything, so I said, 'Sir, you know the bad condition of my mind.' He then wrote something on my tongue. Immediately I forgot my painful depression and was overwhelmed with an inexpressible joy.

Another day Rakhal was meditating in the *natmandir*, and the Master arrived in an ecstatic mood. Addressing Rakhal, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Look, this is your mantram and there is your Chosen Deity.' Immediately Rakhal saw the luminous form of God in front of him and was overwhelmed. He was convinced that his guru had the power to show God to anyone. Filled with ecstatic devotion Rakhal fell at the feet of the Master and again became absorbed in meditation.

Under Ramakrishna's guidance Rakhal began to practise intense spiritual disciplines. He forgot day and night as well as food and family. The Master taught his spiritual son various kinds of spiritual disciplines, such as *asanas* (postures), *mudras* (gestures), *japam*, meditation, yoga, and other practices. One day, the Master initiated Rakhal into the path of Shakti before the Divine Mother and taught him how to practise meditation on the different centres of the kundalini. Rakhal used to secretly practise these disciplines. Rakhal recalled: 'Once I was meditating in the Panchavati at noon while the Master was talking about the manifestation of Brahman as sound [*Shabda-Brahman*]. Listening to that discussion, even

the birds in the Panchavati appeared to sing the Vedic hymns and I heard them.'

While practising sadhana, Rakhal developed some occult powers. Once a worker in the temple garden became sick, and there was no one to look after him. Rakhal served him day and night. One night the patient was in deep pain. Since he had no medicine, Rakhal sat near his head and began to repeat a mantram. After a while he became drowsy; a beautiful, luminous girl of twelve then appeared before him. Recognizing her to be a goddess, Rakhal asked, 'Mother, will this patient be cured?' 'Yes,' replied the girl and disappeared. The next day the patient was miraculously cured.

Ramakrishna was a hard taskmaster. He always insisted that his disciples unite their mind and speech. One day when Rakhal returned from Calcutta, the Master asked: 'Why can't I look at you? Have you done anything wrong?' 'No,' Rakhal replied; because he understood 'wrong action' to mean stealing, robbery, or adultery. The Master again asked, 'Did you tell any lies?' Then Rakhal remembered that the day before, while chatting and joking with two friends, he had told a fib. The Master told him: 'Never do it again. Truthfulness alone is the spiritual discipline in the *kaliyuga*.'

Ramakrishna demonstrated his teachings through his life and actions. Rakhal later recalled:

Oh, how deep was the Master's devotion to truth! If he happened to say that he would not eat any more food, he could not eat more, even if he was hungry. Once he said that he would go to visit Jadu Mallik [whose garden house was adjacent to the Dakshineswar temple garden] but later forgot all about it. I also did not remind him. After supper he suddenly remembered the appointment. It was quite late at night, but he had to go. I accompanied him with a lantern in my hand. When we reached the house we

found it closed and all apparently asleep. The Master pushed back the door of the living room a little, placed his foot inside the room, and then left.

Ramakrishna seldom travelled alone. Someone always went with him to protect his body in case he went into samadhi. On 2 May 1883 the Master attended the Brahmo festival at Nandanbagan, Calcutta, accompanied by M., Rakhal, and a few devotees. At 9:00 p.m. when the worship service was over, the host was busy serving dinner to his important visitors, forgetting the Master and his devotees. M. recorded:

Master (*to Rakhal*): 'What's the matter? Nobody is paying any attention to us!'

Rakhal (*angrily*): 'Sir, let us leave here and go to Dakshineswar.'

Master (*with a smile*): 'Keep quiet! The carriage hire is three rupees and two annas. Who will pay that? Stubbornness won't get us anywhere. You haven't a penny, and you are making these empty threats! Besides, where shall we find food at this late hour of the night?'

After a long time, dinner was served to the Master and he returned to Dakshineswar late at night. Rakhal learned from the Master that it would have been inauspicious for the household if a holy man had left the place without eating.

Sometimes people who go to yogis or holy men have worldly motives, such as to win a lottery or to be cured of a terminal disease. One day, while the Master was talking with Rakhal in the northeastern veranda of his room, he saw a phaeton enter the temple compound. Immediately he rushed to his room and told Rakhal to tell the people in the carriage that he was not available. 'Does a holy man live here?' asked one visitor. 'Yes,' answered Rakhal. Through inquiry he learned that they had come for medicine from the holy man for their sick

relative. Rakhal told them: 'Sri Ramakrishna does not give any medicine, but Durgananda Brahmachari, who lives near the Panchavati, does.' When they left, Rakhal came to the Master, who told him: 'I saw a gloom of *tamas* in them, so I couldn't look at them. That is why I ran away to my room.' He then asked Rakhal: 'When you see a person, can you recognize his character?' 'No, sir,' answered Rakhal. That day the Master taught him various signs by which one can recognize the character of a person. This later helped him to manage the Ramakrishna Order.

In the early part of 1884, while walking towards the pine grove, Sri Ramakrishna fell near the garden railing and dislocated a bone in his left arm. He had been in an ecstatic mood at the time and no one was with him. Rakhal felt guilty about this accident. The Master consoled him: 'You aren't to blame for it, though you are living here to look after me; for even if you had accompanied me, you certainly wouldn't have gone up to the railing.'

Gradually Rakhal became so absorbed in *japam* and meditation that it became difficult for him to serve the Master. On 20 June 1884 Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: 'Rakhal is getting into such a spiritual mood that he can't do anything even for himself. I have to get water for him. He isn't of much service to me.... Rakhal now lives here as one of the family. I know that he will never again be attached to the world. He says that worldly enjoyments have become tasteless to him. His wife came here on her way to Konnagar. She is fourteen. He too was asked to go to Konnagar, but he didn't go. He said, "I don't like merriment and gaiety."'

When an avatar is born as a human being, he behaves like a human being. A great soul like Rakhal—who was an *ishwara-koti* (a godlike soul), *nityasiddha* (an ever-perfect soul), and a companion of Krishna—had a little boyish jealousy. 'It was quite unbearable for him,' said Sri Ramakrishna,

'if I loved anyone but him. He would feel wounded at heart. At that I felt greatly concerned lest he should harm himself by being jealous of those whom Mother would bring here.'

In August 1884 Rakhal became sick and was sent to Calcutta for treatment. Later he went to Vrindaban with Balaram for a change. Just prior to that the Master saw in a vision that the Mother was removing Rakhal from Dakshineswar. He eagerly prayed for his spiritual son: 'Mother, he (Rakhal) is a mere boy, quite ignorant; that is why he sometimes feels piqued. If, for the sake of your work, you remove him from here for some time, keep him in a good place and in a blissful mood.'

In Vrindaban Rakhal again became sick, which greatly concerned the Master. He knew that Rakhal's past life was connected with Krishna in Vrindaban; if he were to remember that, he might give up the body. The Master prayed to the Mother and She comforted him. Gradually Rakhal got well and stayed there nearly three months.

After returning from Vrindaban, Rakhal went to his home in Calcutta. He visited the Master at Dakshineswar and met the new young disciples. He realized then that his guru belonged to all as the moon shines equally upon all; and his jealousy left him forever by the grace of his guru.

The Master noticed that various entanglements were hovering over Rakhal. His relatives and friends were insisting that he take a job and lead a regular householder's life. On 1 March 1885 the Master said to Manomohan, Rakhal's brother-in-law: 'You may take offence at my words, but I said to Rakhal, "I would rather hear that you had drowned yourself in the Ganges than learn that you had accepted a job under another person and become his servant."'

On 7 March 1885 Ramakrishna said: 'Rakhal is now enjoying his "pension." Since his return from Vrindaban he has been staying at home. His wife is there. But he said to

me that he would not accept any work even if he were offered a salary of a thousand rupees.' Later, on 16 April 1886, Ramakrishna said to Girish: 'Rakhal has now understood what is good and what is bad, what is real and what is unreal. He lives with his family, no doubt, but he knows what it means. He has a wife. And a son has been born to him. But he has realized that all these are illusory and impermanent. Rakhal will never be attached to the world. He is like a mudfish. The fish lives in the mud, but there is not the slightest trace of mud on its body.'

If a devotee sincerely loves God, He makes everything favourable for him. Shyama Sundari, Rakhal's mother-in-law, was a devotee of the Master and she understood Rakhal's spiritual inclination. One day Manomohan's aunt said to her: 'It seems that your son-in-law is turning into a monk. Why don't you try to bring his mind back to the world, for your daughter's sake.' 'What can I do?' answered Shyama Sundari. 'Everything depends on the will of the Lord. If my son-in-law becomes a monk, I shall regard it as a great blessing.'

The divine play of an avatar and his disciples is beyond the reach of human understanding. Although most of the time they are established in God-consciousness, they sometimes act like human beings. Ramakrishna told some devotees that Rakhal had a little desire for enjoyment and by the grace of the Mother it was now over. Through the grace of the Master Rakhal demonstrated true renunciation: He was from a well-to-do home and had a young wife and a child, but he left everything for God.

'Oh, what superhuman power the Master had!' recalled Rakhal. 'At that time we thought it was merely a peculiar power with him, but we could not understand the nature of it. Now we realize what a wonderful power it was! One day I said to him: "Sir, I cannot get rid of lust. What shall I do?" He touched me in the region of the heart, muttering some indistinct words. All lust van-

ished from me forever! I have never felt its existence since then.'

In the middle of 1885 Ramakrishna developed throat cancer, and Rakhal began to stay with him at Dakshineswar. On 9 August 1885 M. recorded in the *Gospel*:

It was nine o'clock in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch. It was Mahimacharan's desire to form a *brahmachakra* [a mystic circle prescribed in tantra] in the presence of the Master. Mahima formed a circle, on the floor, with Rakhal, M., Kishori, and one or two other devotees. He asked them all to meditate. Rakhal went into an ecstatic state. The Master came down from the couch and placed his hand on Rakhal's chest, repeating the name of the Divine Mother. Rakhal regained consciousness of the outer world.

In September 1885 Ramakrishna was taken to Calcutta for treatment; he lived there for three months. Then on 11 December 1885 he was moved to the Cossipore garden house. Rakhal served the Master along with other disciples. Sometime in the middle of January 1886, the elder Gopal wanted to distribute twelve pieces of ochre cloth and twelve rosaries among some monks. Pointing to his young disciples, the Master said to him: 'You won't find better monks than these. Give your cloths and rosaries to them.' Instead, Gopal offered them to the Master and he himself distributed them to Rakhal and other young disciples.

Ramakrishna's health was gradually deteriorating. On 15 March 1886 M. writes:

Like a mother showing her tenderness to her children, he [Sri Ramakrishna] touches the faces and chins of Rakhal and Narendra. A few minutes later he says to M.: 'If the body were to be preserved a few days more, many people would have

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Khetri Maharaja's Boon-Born Babe

SWAMI EKATMANANDA

The contact of a great soul like Swami Vivekananda with the Maharaja of Khetri filled the heart of the latter with devotion to God leading to his becoming a disciple. The Maharaja was soon blessed with a son—one who proved to be highly gifted though, unfortunately, short-lived. This article by Swami Ekatmananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, reveals the noble qualities of the son, who later ascended to the throne.

When all arrangements for Swami Vivekananda's sailing to North America on 31 May 1893 for his participation at Chicago in the World's Parliament of Religions, to be held there a few months later, were being made, Munshi Jagmohanlal, the Private Secretary to the Maharaja of Khetri, appeared on the scene and stopped the plan for the time being. '...the Khetri Rajaji was very, very anxious to see me and had sent his Private Secretary to Madras; and so I was bound to leave for Khetri,' wrote¹ Swamiji on 28 April 1893 to Haridas Viharidas Desai, the Dewan of Junagadh.

About two years earlier, Swamiji was the State-guest at the palace of the Khetri Maharaja. After the Maharaja's marriage to Champavati of Jodhpur in 1876 the couple had only two daughters, Suryakumari (b. 1879) and Chandrakumari (b. 1888) but no heir (male issue) to the ancient Raj of Khetri. The Raja felt greatly dejected as he had no son to succeed him to the throne. In fact, his close well-wishers had urged him to go in for a second marriage solely on this account but he had politely brushed aside all persuasion. The Maharaja therefore prayed to Swamiji to bless him so that a son may be born to him. Swamiji, noting the Raja's anxiety in the matter, bestowed on his royal

disciple his benediction accordingly.

Now that a son was born, the Raja in his excitement and joy sent his Private Secretary to Madras to get Swamiji, his Guru, for the festivities. Arriving at Madras and learning that Swamiji was living at Mr. Manmatha Bhattacharya's house, Jagmohanlal hurried there. Even as he was anxious to meet Swamiji, the latter was surprised to see him so unexpectedly and asked what brought him that far away, when Jagmohanlal explained. Swamiji quipped that every preparation being under way for his embarkation to the U.S.A. only a month later, how could he go to Khetri just then. The messenger persisted saying that even it be for just a day, Swamiji must accompany him to Khetri and that the Maharaja himself would see to the proper arrangement made for his going to the West. Finally, Swamiji agreed. On the way to Khetri Swamiji stopped at Vapingana,* Bombay and Jaipur.

Swamiji arrived at Khetri late evening when the palace was *en fête* and lit up

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 8, p. 293.

* Despite my herculean endeavour, the location of Vapingana still eludes me. Unless Vapingana was of some great importance, Swamiji who was in a hurry to reach Khetri and return to Bombay in order to sail on his mission, would not have cared to halt there. However, from a recent enlightening source I presume that it is possible that Vapingana could have been 'Wapigaon' in the Paithan

resplendently. Indeed, the festivities had commenced three or four days before, and the whole town was beautifully decorated. Singing, dancing and music were in full swing on all sides. The Maharaja was at the time in his State barge, surrounded by State-guests, some of whom were the Chiefs of Rajputana. When Jagmohanlal presented himself there with Swamiji, the Maharaja rose from his seat and prostrated himself before his Guru. All present also rose to their feet and bowed to Swamiji. The musicians sang a song of welcome as he was led to a seat of honour. Then the Maharaja formally introduced him to the assembled guests and told them how Swamiji had blessed him that a son might be born to him and also of Swamiji's decision to visit the West to preach the profound *Sanatana Dharma*. At this the whole assembly cheered. The barely three-month old babe was brought in to be blessed by Swamiji.

Very few people may know what happened to that uncommon boon-born babe. In this article is presented, therefore, a brief biography of that son of Maharaja Ajit Singh of Khetri.

The third and the last child Jai Singh of Raja Ajit Singh Bahadur was born at Agra on 27 January 1893. The joy of the parents, the subjects of Khetri and the well-wishers and friends of the Raj elsewhere knew no bounds. After several weeks, a special celebration to commemorate the happy occasion fittingly with great rejoicing was organized at Khetri. Shekhavati had never seen such a grand and prolonged celebration. Maharaja Ajit Singh liberally rewarded the distinguishing guests, the most august of whom was of course Swami Vivekananda. Prisoners were released and an outstanding

tax of over a lakh of rupees was written off.

Even as an infant Rajkumar Jai Singh's health was not good. As he grew up to the age of five, his schooling started. On his reaching the sixth standard, the Maharaja established a sort of a private hostel in the palace for some fifty children of the same average age in order to give education and suitable company to his beloved son, and hoped to hand over later the State administration to the young Rajkumar, himself betaking subsequently to a life of renunciation. However, by the will of Providence, Raja Ajit Singh Bahadur suddenly expired at Agra on 18 January 1901, even before his son Jai Singh turned a youth. Soon after, at the tender age of eight years, Jai Singh succeeded to the throne of Khetri, the sad news of his father's death having been studiously withheld from him till his ascension. But the precocious prince understood it all before long. After a short period, Raja Jai Singh Bahadur, accompanied by his mother Rajmata Champavati Sahiba and some officials of the State, went to Jaipur for the customary mourning in which, among others, the Maharaja of Jaipur and also the British Resident offered their deep condolences to the bereaved souls.

Now the official business of Khetri was conducted by Pandit Gopinathji, an old minister of the late Raja Sahib, at the instance of Rajmata Champavati. Ill health cut short his tenure and the British Resident took over as Supervisor. Later, till Raja Jai Singh Bahadur turned legally of age, Pandit Shivnath Chak, a retired government official from Madhya Pradesh, remained a *Mumsarim* (Manager) by appointment.

Raja Sahib Jai Singh was under the tutorage of Pandit Shankarlal, the Superintendent of Khetri Education Department. Besides general education, he had training in horse-riding as well as in sports and games, and later made a mark in shooting. Subsequently, Pandit Chandradhar Sharma Gulari took over the tutelary of Raja Jai Singh

Taluk of Aurangabad district of former Hyderabad State (1931 Census Report); and as Paithan (Pratishthanpura) is an historically important place, Swamiji may have wanted to peep into Vapingana.

who now (in July 1904) joined the Mayo College at Ajmer, his maternal uncle taking care of him. Pandit Gulari proudly certified to Jai Singh's studious habits, exemplary behaviour and very cordial relations with the staff and students of the college.

Once, traditionally dressed with a sword in his hand, Raja Jai Singh met the Agent for the Governor General of Rajputana, who observantly remarked, 'Raja Sahib, this age is not of that (sword) but of this (showing his pen), and you should be proficient to handle it.' Pat was the reply by Jai Singh: 'Indeed, both are essential to us!' In 1905 he dedicated the Ajit Singh Hospital in memory of his late lamented father. Three years later, he was ceremonially invested with the sacred thread (*Yajnopavita*). Unfortunately for him, his very dear mother Rajmata Champavati died in May 1908 with symptoms of TB, and now at fifteen years of age he was left without both parents. But the young Raja endured the calamity with courage and a cool head, coupled with surprising wisdom, and astonishingly consoled one and all who came to console him. In addition, he strictly adhered to the prescribed severe austerity during the mourning period.

A distinct change came over him after the sad demise of his mother Rajmata Champavati. He would surprisingly talk of *Bhakti*, *Vairagya* and *Jnana* as a mature man. An ardent lover of Sanskrit, he had already got by heart a number of slokas from Bhartrihari's *Neeti Shatakam* and *Vairagya Shatakam*, and quoted from them quite often. People off and on heard him tell, 'This world is a mere dream, full of pain. The remembrance of God alone yields lasting bliss. Hence one should not get attached to the world. How I wish to retire to the Himalayas and meditate on God on the bank of the sacred Ganga and remain immersed in bliss!' His regular prayer, expressions on the vanity of the world, and the talk of a detached life—in short, his apparently excessive bent towards

purely spiritual life not only amazed but also alarmed his servants and both his sisters and his scholar-mentor Pandit Gulari, too. They wondered if he could have been an enlightened soul in his previous birth and had come again ordained by God, for, otherwise, how could he, while so young, develop such an intense leaning towards spirituality, preoccupied apparently as he was with his college studies. Strangely he never talked about his marriage and allied matters. But, he evinced a passionate thirst for acquiring higher knowledge.

During 1909–10, he made a tour of Khetri in order to know his subjects and their woes, if any. Proud of his motherland and of his Rajput wardrobe, he kept himself out of undesirable and harmful tendencies such as taking to tobacco or alcohol. Nay, he would exhort his classmates and friends to take the vow of leading a pure life. Later, when Jai Singh was to receive the Diploma on the meritoriously successful completion of his education at the Mayo College, he had developed a bad whooping cough which regrettably gave proof of advancing TB. Soon brought from Ajmer to Jaipur, despite expert medical care, young Raja Jai Singh Bahadur fell prematurely a prey to the disease which had aggravated beyond control and remedy at the close of March 1910, and thus ended a precious and rare life.

During his last days on this earth, Raja Jai Singh bequeathed Rs. 50,000/- for charity, which money was later utilized for enlarging the Jai Singh High School at Khetri.

Reasonably the whole of Khetri plunged, as it were, into darkness. Touching comments flowed from the journals of the day to the effect:

The thought of the untimely passing away of such a virtuous, promising and educated royal youth, whose unassuming nature and love for the country, its hoary heritage and its people is worthy of emulation, is poignantly painful.

In memory of the deceased young Raja, a tablet was erected by his sorrowing friends at the Jaipur House of the Mayo College, which read:

In memory of
the late Raja Jai Singh Bahadur of Khetri
who joined the Mayo College
in July 1904 and
gave promise of a very brilliant career
and a life of useful public service but
passed away at Jaipur on
the 30th March 1910 at the age of 17 years.
Born: 27th January 1893.
Died: 30th March 1910.

A devout soul with reverence towards saintly persons, the late Raja Jai Singh Bahadur had expressed, a few weeks prior to breathing his last, a desire to see Swami Atmananda Swayamprakash Saraswatiji for whom he had great love and veneration. When the saint arrived a day earlier to his passing away, Jai Singh wanted that he sit by his bed-side and read some *slokas* from *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita*. Listening attentively

with a placid and calm countenance, he sought clarification of a few of the *slokas*. Even as he heard the words of the saint, his soul departed leaving the body dead. Tears trickled down the eyes of Swami Atmanandaji who was well known for his spiritual attainments. He spoke out, 'I, an ascetic, who have relinquished all earthly relationship, am moved by his spiritual fervour, love and reverence. I do not remember any other occasion when tears came to my eyes. Indeed, he was an illumined soul.'

At the Jaipur crematorium, where Jai Singh's mortal frame was confined to the fire, a big and magnificent *Chhatra* (umbrella) was constructed and under it regular Shiva Puja was inaugurated.

Does not the extraordinary life of Jai Singh prove the Vivekananda touch and also remind us of the Pauranic tradition of couples who pant and pray for a male offspring, and given the choice between a very good but short-lived one and several mediocre children of much longer life, select the former? □

Swami Brahmananda

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their spirituality awakened.... Such is not the will of God.'

Rakhal (*tenderly*): 'Please speak to God that He may preserve your body some time more.'

Master: 'That depends on God's will.'...

Rakhal: 'We pray that you may not go away and leave us behind.'

Sri Ramakrishna smiles and says: 'A band of minstrels suddenly appears, dances, and sings, and it departs in the same sudden manner. They come and they return, but none recognizes them.'

Once at the Cossipore garden house Ramakrishna remarked: 'Rakhal has the keen intelligence of a king. If he chose, he could rule a kingdom.' Narendra understood that the Master wanted Rakhal to be the future leader of his disciples, so he told his brother disciples, 'Henceforth, we shall call Rakhal our *Raja*, king.' The Master was pleased when he heard this. Later Rakhal became known in the Ramakrishna Order as *Maharaj*, or Great King.

(to be continued)

India, Our Motherland-II

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Feel, my children, feel; feel for the poor, the ignorant, the downtrodden; feel till the heart stops and the brain reels and you think you will go mad—then pour the soul out at the feet of the Lord, and then will come power, help, and indomitable energy. Struggle, struggle, was my motto for the last ten years. Struggle, still say I. When it was all dark, I used to say, struggle; when light is breaking in, I still say, struggle. Be not afraid, my children.

Have fire and spread all over. Work, work. Be the servant while leading. Be unselfish, and *never listen to one friend in private accusing another*. Have infinite patience, and success is yours....Take care! Beware of everything that is untrue; stick to truth and we shall succeed, maybe slowly, but surely. Work on as if I never existed. Work as if on each of you depended the whole work. Fifty centuries are looking on you, the future of India depends on you. Work on.

My faith is in the younger generation, the modern generation, out of them will come my workers. They will work out the whole problem, like lions. I have formulated the idea and have given my life to it.... You have the greatest religion which the world ever saw... You have the perennial fountain flowing.... I want to start at first ... institutions for educating missionaries to be both spiritual and secular instructors to our masses. They will spread from centre to centre, until we have covered the whole of India.

What we want are some young men who will renounce everything and sacrifice their lives for the country's sake. We should first form their lives and then some real work can be expected.

With no strength in the body, no enthusiasm at heart, and no originality in the brain, what will they do—these lumps of dead matter! By stimulating them I want to bring life into them—to this I have dedicated my life. I will rouse them through the infallible power of Vedic Mantras. I am born to proclaim to them that fearless message—'Arise! Awake!' Be you my helpers in this work!

If you are really my children, you will fear nothing, stop at nothing. You will be like lions. We must rouse India and the whole world.... My children must be ready to jump into fire, if needed, to accomplish their work. Now work, work, work! We will stop and compare notes later on. Have patience, perseverance, and purity.

Know this for certain that he who will work will be the crown on my head. Useless bandying of words and making noise is taking away our time, is consuming our life-energy...

Work unto death—I am with you, and when I am gone, my spirit will work with you. This life comes and goes—wealth, fame, enjoyments are only of a few days. It is better, far better to die on the field of duty, preaching the truth, than to die like a worldly worm. Advance!

Second Transition in India and Swami Vivekananda

VIJAY KASKHEDIKAR

In this article, the author of Nagpur, points out that 'the real crisis today lies in a lack of seriousness in living a religion of Vedanta as lived and preached by Swamiji. In spite of ever increasing religious festivity there is a very casual approach to the life of God-consciousness which is the basic note of Swamiji's preachings. It is therefore imperative today to meditate again with all the seriousness on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda,' and adds further that 'the urgent need today is to shift our stress from mere activity to God-consciousness behind it.'

The first transition which began with English education in India in 1836 brought with it (i) the Western spirit of scientific inquiry into everything associated with religion, (ii) disbelief in super-conscious experiences, and (iii) belief in the dictum 'True values are sensory' (of Greek origin). But religious urge being its inherent nature, India reacted against this impact in the form of militant orthodoxy on the one hand, and a zeal for religious revival on the other. The basis for all the vigorous attempts to revive religion was to reform the society as an urgent necessity. For the advocates of reformation, religion was the only cause of degradation in India. Against this background and with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, India realized that 'Religion is realization', 'Self-realization' is the only goal of life, and that all the changes that are to be brought about in India are to be effected through religion alone. The only question was how to make religion and its goal, Self-realization, practical, and this Swami Vivekananda has shown to the world. By his first-hand knowledge of the classes and masses in India and through his brief encounter with the different strata of the American society in the pre-Parliament days, Swamiji could grasp the immediate needs of India and the world. And therefore

after his epochal appearance in the Parliament of Religions, he inspired many Indian disciples to be dynamic first as a preparatory stage for the fulfilment of his mission to rejuvenate the Vedantic religion.

As soon as he landed at Colombo (then a part of India) on his triumphant return, he declared in his first public address (on 16 January 1897): 'Political greatness or military power is never the mission of our race; it never was, and, mark my words, it never will be. But there has been the other mission given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to pour forth in a deluge on the world whenever circumstances are propitious.'¹ In the same tone he further declared in his address at Jaffna: 'What we now want in our country, however, is not so much of weeping (for God), but a little strength.'² He said, 'Make your children strong from their very childhood; teach them not weakness, nor forms, but make them strong; let them stand on their feet—bold, all-conquering, all-suffering;

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 3, pp. 108–109.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 103.

and first of all, let them learn of the glory of the soul. That you get alone in the Vedanta—and there alone.’³ In other words, spreading the life-giving message of Vedanta, i.e., Sanatana Dharma, to one and all is the prime duty for every one of us who loves India. In the words of Swami Vivekananda from the same address, ‘The one vital duty incumbent on you, if you really love your religion, if you really love your country, is that you must struggle hard to be up and doing, with this one great idea of bringing out the treasures from your closed books and delivering them over to their rightful heirs.’⁴ This has been the core of Swamiji’s message through the length and breadth of the country.

However, to give shape to this message, some infrastructural changes were necessary. To bring these changes Swamiji preached: (1) Cautious acceptance of material prosperity to uplift the masses and to awaken their receptive capacity benumbed due to extreme poverty, and making them aware of their inherent strength through education, (2) Organization, (3) Avoidance of jealousy, (4) Learning Science and Technology from the West, and (5) Deluging the world with India’s spirituality.

Due to the electrifying effect of this message no doubt we can say today, a century after, that we have sufficiently mastered Western science and technology, we have become sufficiently dynamic, and developed a reasonably good organizational skill in all the walks of life. Thus the first transition was from a state of anarchy. Now that crisis is over.

In spite of these achievements there is still a universal restlessness. Everyone feels that something vital is missing. A little pondering over the present state of affairs reveals a frustrating discrepancy between the rapid pace at which the message of Swamiji

and Vedanta are spreading and their less effectiveness in transforming an individual’s life. We are miserably facing the crisis of character today. The only reason for this state of affairs is that the ideas preached are not lived. The real crisis today lies in a lack of seriousness in living a religion of Vedanta as lived and preached by Swamiji. In spite of ever increasing religious festivity there is a very casual approach to the life of God-consciousness which is the basic note of Swamiji’s preachings. It is therefore imperative today to meditate again with all the seriousness on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda.

The intense urge for God-realization was the main tone of Swami Vivekananda’s life in his formative days. After attaining absolute fulfilment through *nirvikalpa samadhi* the same urge was shifted to lead others towards fulfilment and to preach the way towards that goal. As an Acharya he declared that ‘Religion is realization’. His sojourn in the West as well as in India was just to shift the stress of life from materialism to God-centredness and to make the infrastructural changes for accomplishing this. As a part of infrastructural change he preached a shift from ritualism to humanitarian activities and works of charity considering oneself to be an instrument in God’s hands. In other words he preached *Karma-yoga* with a change in the form of Karma. *Karma-yoga* means that work is to be done by looking upon oneself as an instrument in the hands of the divine and seeing the divine in the served. We have accepted Karma, i.e., dynamism, and not the Yoga, i.e., the consciousness behind it as preached by Swamiji. That is the reason why in spite of tremendous activities in all the walks of life and dynamism, there is a feeling of restlessness and a crisis of character. Therefore, the urgent need today is to shift our stress from mere activity to the God-consciousness behind it. Instead of clinging to duality consciousness,

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3. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 130-31.

4. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 134.

Parallelism between Modern Physics and Vedanta

DR. ARDHENDU SEKHAR GHOSH

Dr. Ardhendu Sekhar Ghosh, a research scientist in Nuclear and Inorganic Chemistry, worked with Indian Atomic Energy Organization from 1957 to 1976. He was also a visiting scientist for some time at the Argonne National Laboratory, Illinois, USA, and is a Fellow/Member of several professional societies. He has to his credit many research publications in his field of specialization. He has co-authored/authored several books on spirituality and Indian culture published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay. In this lucid article, Dr. Ardhendu Sekhar Ghosh brings to focus the fact that some of the conclusions of modern science are strikingly analogous to those of Vedanta and other ancient schools of mysticism.

Modern science and technology undoubtedly command a prestigious and dominant position in academic circles and in global economics as well, in view of their unique achievements. It may moreover be noted (a) that 'science' in the sense of 'systematic studies of natural phenomena', at least in so far as its present state of development is concerned, is different from supra-intellectual spirituality in that spirituality is concerned with the totality of human experience whereas science limits itself to a study of the outer physical world to the total exclusion of higher levels of human consciousness; and (b) that 'science' though closely allied to, is yet not the same as 'technology' or the applied sciences. Science, being concerned with a genuine quest for (i) reality or truth, and (ii) unifying principles behind the phenomenal world characterized by changeability and diversity, consists primarily of intellectual activity, and therefore cannot do any harm to humankind. On the contrary, technology can do not only good but also great harm such as the threat of nuclear weapons, rapid depletion of non-renewable resources, environmental pollution, to mention a few.

Based on the world-view they provide, there exist some notable differences between what is known as 'Modern Physics' and the 'Classical Newtonian Physics'. The former includes the revolutionary Theory of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics as well as other recent developments. In classical physics, for example, 'matter' and 'energy' were taken for granted as two entirely separate entities and one considered the conservation of matter and the conservation of energy separately. This barrier has been broken down by the theory of relativity and the two entities are established to be inter-convertible and blended into a matter-energy continuum. Similarly, in modern physics 'time' and 'space' are no longer considered to be two entirely disconnected variables. One now talks of a four-dimensional continuum comprising time and the three-dimensional space. Modern physics has moreover shown that the 'observed' cannot be completely isolated from the 'observer'. The very event of observation introduces some change in the 'observed', which change is of course of very small magnitude for massive objects but has to be taken into account in the case of very small sub-atomic particles. Modern physics thus leads us towards a

(w)holistic world-view.

In view of the foregoing, modern physics would be the crest-jewel amongst all the branches of today's science. On the other hand, Vedanta, the outpouring of our ancient sages and seers, embodies supra-intellectual wisdom gathered from beyond the reach of the mind and the senses through inspiration. To look for any harmony between these two could be revealing and interesting.

Despite the fact that modern physics is not concerned with any non-sensory perception, some of its conclusions are nevertheless strikingly analogous to those of Vedanta and other ancient schools of mysticism. A few, as illustration, are furnished below:

a) The history of evolution of scientific thought in Europe clearly teaches us the folly of clinging to concepts too closely. A typical example thereof would be the spectacular evolution of the aforesaid concepts of modern physics from those of the classical Newtonian physics. To this extent it is an echo of the ancient wisdom.

b) One of the conclusions of modern physics is that the innumerable creations and destructions which are observed to occur all around and at all times, are only apparent, and that in reality they are transformations of *one* indestructible entity which sometimes manifests itself as gross material objects and at other times as diverse subtle forms of energy. This is in close harmony with the Vedantic truth that the Reality¹ is ONE, the changing

universe of diversity is but an appearance.

c) Since spiritual experience is supra-mental, it is impossible to express the same in ordinary language, as language itself consists of symbols created by ordinary mind and intellect. Huxley⁴ rightly points out, 'So far, then, as a fully adequate expression of the perennial philosophy is concerned, there exists a problem in semantics that is finally insoluble. The fact is one which must be strictly borne in mind by all who read its formulations. Only in this way shall we be able to understand even remotely what is being talked about.'

Ordinary language is similarly found inadequate for describing quantum mechanical conclusions. Elementary particles, for example, are no longer 'material' in the same sense as objects of daily life such as trees, stones, etc. are. As Heisenberg says, '...But we cannot speak about atoms in ordinary language.'

astronomy, it is concluded that the sun does not move the way the eyes see it. This clearly reveals the inadequacy of our knowledge gained through our senses as compared to that through the intellect which thus belongs to a higher hierarchical level. As a matter of fact the existence of different hierarchical levels of knowledge, or of awareness, is admitted not only by the ancient rishis² but also modern writers³. Since an intellectual being remains bound by the limitations of the ego-consciousness, he is unable to realize the 'Absolute Reality'. In order to get rid of the aforesaid limitations, one has to transcend the multi-dimensional realm to the realm of spirituality through *sādhana*.

1. A little more elaboration regarding 'Reality' is perhaps in order. All of us, without exception, perceive with our eyes that the sun rises and sets. Yet when the same phenomenon is viewed through the intellect and not the senses, e.g. when examined by the science of

2. See *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad*, for example.

3. See, for example, Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (London: Pan Books, 1981), ch. III.

4. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1989).

Atom is an idea which, we are now told, we cannot even picture. If atom itself cannot be pictured, what to speak of an electron, a still smaller particle!

d) Mysticism defies our ordinary concept of space, time, matter and conventional logic. So also does modern physics. A few examples thereof are: (i) When an electron transits from one orbital to another in an atom, it is supposed not to traverse the intervening space; (ii) Feynman's diagram depicting an electron moving forward in time can be taken to depict a positron (an anti-particle capable of annihilating an electron) moving backward in time; (iii) The unconventional 'yes'-AND-'no' logic is invoked for explaining the duality of particle-wave nature of a sub-atomic entity. As Koestler⁵ sums up, '...physics turns into metaphysics with a flavour of mysticism'.

e) The failure of the principle of causality and determinism at the sub-atomic level has led many outstanding scientists including Einstein to speculate about some 'hidden variables' which, according to them, perhaps ruled and determined these seemingly indeterminate processes. While in the micro-world of atoms and sub-atomic particles, the events are indeterministic, in the macro-world, in contrast, a deterministic pattern is observed. We must not fail to note that each macro-event consists of a large number of micro-events at the atomic/sub-atomic level.

In view of the above, many physicists have postulated that the aforesaid 'hidden variables', though non-physical, are yet real in nature. Some of them, including a few Nobel laureates, are of the opinion that mind/consciousness may

be the non-physical entity.⁶

Several outstanding Western scientists and scholars have of late come out openly in favour of spiritualizing science. Moreover, a feeling is growing that Eastern mysticism in general, and Indian spiritual tradition in particular, could provide the necessary insight.⁶

The discovery of the harmony between modern science and the ancient spiritual wisdom has been possible, not only because the dogmas and taboos of the nineteenth century physics have got demolished, but also because the scientific thinking and methodology have undergone a revolutionary change. The 'systems approach' is one such methodology which is pregnant with far-reaching possibilities. Instead of concentrating on basic building blocks for an understanding of the system as a whole, the systems approach emphasizes basic principles of organization in a whole system. The specific structures of the wholes arise from the interaction between and interdependence of their parts. The nature of the whole may be different at times from a mere sum of its parts. Thus, one has to take the total system into consideration even while one tries to understand a part.

This approach is indeed closely akin to the comprehensive and integral approach of all schools of spiritual thought.⁷

5. Arthur Koestler, *Physics and Metaphysics*, in 'Janus—A Summing Up' (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1979), pp. 244–72.

6. For more details, see the following books:

Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters—An Overview of the New Physics* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980).

Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (London: Wildwood House, 1975).

Michael Talbot, *Mysticism and the New Physics* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980).

D.S. Kothari, *Atom and Self* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1983).

7. Fritjof Capra, *The New Vision of Reality—A*

The universe is seen as a dynamic web of inter-related events. None of the properties of any part of this web is fundamental; they all follow from the properties of other parts, and the overall consistency of their inter-relation determines the structure of the entire web.⁸

As a corollary, it appears also that the study of a part gives an insight into the whole on 'the analogy of a hologram, in which each part, in some sense, contains the whole. If any part of hologram is illuminated, the entire image will be reconstructed.'⁹

As is said by the ancient seers, what is in the *brahmāṇḍa* is in the *piṇḍāṇḍa*. Is this not reminiscent of what is said in the *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad*:

Dear boy, just as through a single clod

Synthesis of Eastern Wisdom and Western Science (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1983).

8. Ibid., p. 84.

9. Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1983), pp. 87–8.

of clay all that is made of clay would become known, for all modification is but name based upon words and the clay alone is real; just as through a single ingot of gold, all that is made of gold would become known, for all modification is but name based upon words and the gold alone is real; just as through a single nail-parer all that is made of iron would become known, for all modifications is but name based upon words and the iron alone is real.¹⁰

Indeed the microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan as pointed out by Swami Vivekananda.¹¹ □

Acknowledgement: The author is indebted to the Editorial Staff of the *Prabuddha Bharata* for a number of valuable criticisms and helpful suggestions, many of which have been freely used in this article.

10. *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad*, 6.1.4–6.

11. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 2, p. 448.

Second Transition in India and Swami Vivekananda

(Continued from page 635)

activity should be done with God-consciousness. Then alone will our actions become *Karma-yoga*. It is this consciousness behind every activity that leads to purity of mind and spiritual evolution and not mere activity. By the culture of God-consciousness alone can we fulfil our mission to conserve and preserve the accumulated spiritual energy and deluge the country and the rest of the world with it.

Therefore, let the watchword of the beginning of the second transition in India be

the change of consciousness behind everything we do and attainment of the goal of human life, namely, God-realization. Infrastructure as desired by Swamiji is now ready. What is required is a mere shifting of stress from mere dynamism to dynamism with a changed consciousness. □

* This article, communicated by the author, appeared earlier in *Hitavada*. Permission has been obtained by the author for its republication.

Emeralds of the Indian Ocean

SWAMI BHAKTIRUPANANDA

Andaman and Nicobar group of islands have always evoked mixed feelings in the hearts of Indians. Before Independence, it was considered a dreaded area where the freedom fighters were sent to pay for their temerity to overthrow the British Empire. The stress is now on development of this area. In this article Swami Bhaktirupananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, gives an account of the impressions of his visit to these islands.

When finally the ship laid its anchor for a night's halt, darkness was just setting in. It was the month of October in 1995, barely a couple of days before the full moon. The place was midstream in the river Hooghly at Garden Reach hardly a kilometre away from Kidderpore Docks in Calcutta. Due to the hazards of navigating an ocean liner like *M.V. Nicobar*, through too narrow a canal, it had taken three hours to arrive at this spot. There were lock-gates in between in order to adjust for the differences in water levels between the dock and the river. A seafaring vessel is a floating township carrying 1,500 passengers and crew besides tonnes of cargo.

The voyage really began early the next morning. The industrial suburbs on both the banks slowly faded out of sight. Around noon, the township of Haldia and the shipyard were in view. After a two-hour halt due to low tide, the ship again set sail and steamed past the Sagar Island. Due to the heavy silt deposited by the river Hooghly, the bay at the mouth is very shallow and only skilled pilots of the Calcutta Port Trust are allowed to pilot a ship up to Sandheads, a halting point in the open sea sixty-five kilometres to the south of the mouth of the Hooghly. We reached Sandheads around 6 p.m. and the bright lights of more than a dozen ships lying at anchor awaiting entry to the port of Calcutta made it appear as if it were a port.

The light was feeble due to the overcast skies. The sea was choppy as usual at this time of the year, though not turbulent. The giant luxury liner built in Europe rolled sideways as waves lashed against it.

As we sat relaxed on the deck, a gentleman from Uttar Pradesh serving in the Andamans began to narrate his experiences of numerous voyages across the bay. The mighty ship seemed insignificant in comparison to the immensity of the ocean. The waves, after dashing against the hull of the ship leapt on to the open deck periodically even as the ship continued to roll rather heavily and uncomfortably. I stayed out on the deck for several hours till the early hours of the morning.

After a few hours of sleep, when I looked out through the porthole, I noticed that the turbid waters of Sandheads had given way to the deep blue of the deep sea. The sight was fascinating. I was out on the deck once more. There is seldom any variety on the high seas except for the sunrise and sunset. Yet the monotonous stretch of the deep blue never ceases to interest the eyes. The only sea animal which greeted my eyes occasionally during the voyage was the flying fish which flew past to a safe distance at the approach of the ship.

An announcement said that we were 200 nautical miles away from Sandheads

and would reach Coco Channel at the northern entrance to the Andamans around 2 a.m. the next day. It takes nearly thirty hours to sail from the coastline on the mainland to the outer fringe of the islands.

A casual stroll through the ship revealed that it had round-the-clock facilities for shopping, restaurants, swimming pools, library, hospital, entertainment halls, lounges and a helipad. The elegance of the Dining Saloon, it is said, could match in standard any of the 5-star hotels. Facilities such as a desalination plant, automatic fire-fighting units, etc. are also available. Life-buoys and life-boats, sufficient for the entire crew and passengers, are ready to handle any emergency. The entire ship is air-conditioned. There are ordinary bunks on the lower decks. There are also different types of cabins with varying degrees of comfort. There is the navigators' bridge atop, with ultramodern piloting facilities including radars. The huge engine room down below has computerized control for manoeuvring the ship, and all one has to do is to manually operate a few settings on the panel board. There is a team of marine engineers for routine maintenance and emergency repairs.

Overcast skies and rains can turn into cyclonic weather conditions any time, although, thanks to the advantages of the latest technology, an impending crisis to the maritime traffic can be averted through routine weather forecasts on global basis. Captain Ghosh narrated some of his hazardous voyages across the Pacific Ocean which, contrary to its name, is the roughest.

However, a sea voyage has its many rewards. While cruising close to the islands, friendly dolphins make their sudden appearance in groups and swim beside the ship for long distances. They take somersaults and play among themselves giving much amusement to the passengers. It is

said that during shipwrecks dolphins bring ashore the drowning passengers and therefore the slaughter of dolphins is banned. The most intelligent among the sea animals, the dolphins are also the most friendly to human beings.

The ship passed west of the volcanic Barren Island. It is said that at night luminous eruptions could be seen from the ship for long distances if the volcano becomes active.

After about 1,000 kms of cruise on the high seas, land was sighted while passing close to the Coco Islands belonging to Myanmar (Burma). It is believed that these islands house Chinese missile bases. Next we passed the Landfall Island belonging to the Andaman group. In the afternoon the ship passed close to the Saddle Peak, 2,400 feet high, which is the highest peak in the Andamans. Nearby is the Aerial Bay, the chief attraction for the Bengali settlement of Digilipur.

Early the next morning the ship entered the beautiful Mayabander harbour in the Middle Andamans. The sea is dotted with green islands and small rocks. Since the submerged rocks pose problems in darkness, the ship has necessarily to navigate the bay close to the harbour in daylight. The ship steamed off at 8 a.m. and, after coming out into the Andaman sea, sailed close to the group of islands called the Middle and South Andamans. The sea around the eastern coastline of the Andamans was very rough but safe enough for the ocean liner. Leaving behind the Rangat harbour to the west and the Ritchie Archipelago, Havelock and Neill Islands to the east, the ship, at the end of a marathon four-day voyage, finally entered the harbour and docked at Haddo in Port Blair, the capital of the Andaman and Nicobar group of Islands. Port Blair derives its name from Archibald Blair, the surveyor

who was commissioned by the British Government to survey the islands for use as a penal settlement.

Port Blair

A beautiful town with a population of nearly one lakh, Port Blair has broad promenades skirting the town along the coastline, modern markets and places of tourist interest such as the Water Sports Complex, Corbyn's Cove Beach, Anthropological Museum, Samudrika (Marine Museum), Chatham Saw Mill (acclaimed to be the largest in Asia), Mini Zoo, etc.

Cellular Jail converted into a national monument in 1979, was built by the British between 1896 and 1906. It is a three-storeyed structure overlooking the sea. There were 698 cells in seven wings spreading out from a central tower. The cells are narrow and dark with only a ventilator at a height of 3 metres. On the first floor of the tower is a list of 336 martyrs, all deported from the mainland. Out of the seven wings, four were badly damaged by an earthquake and the Japanese attack in 1941. Now it houses a museum containing accounts of freedom fighters imprisoned there. A touching programme of light and sound (*son-et-lumiere*) on the history of the jail is worth attending. The cell where Veer Savarkar spent his years of torment and isolation has been well preserved. A commanding view of the city, the Ross Island and the sea can be had from the central tower.

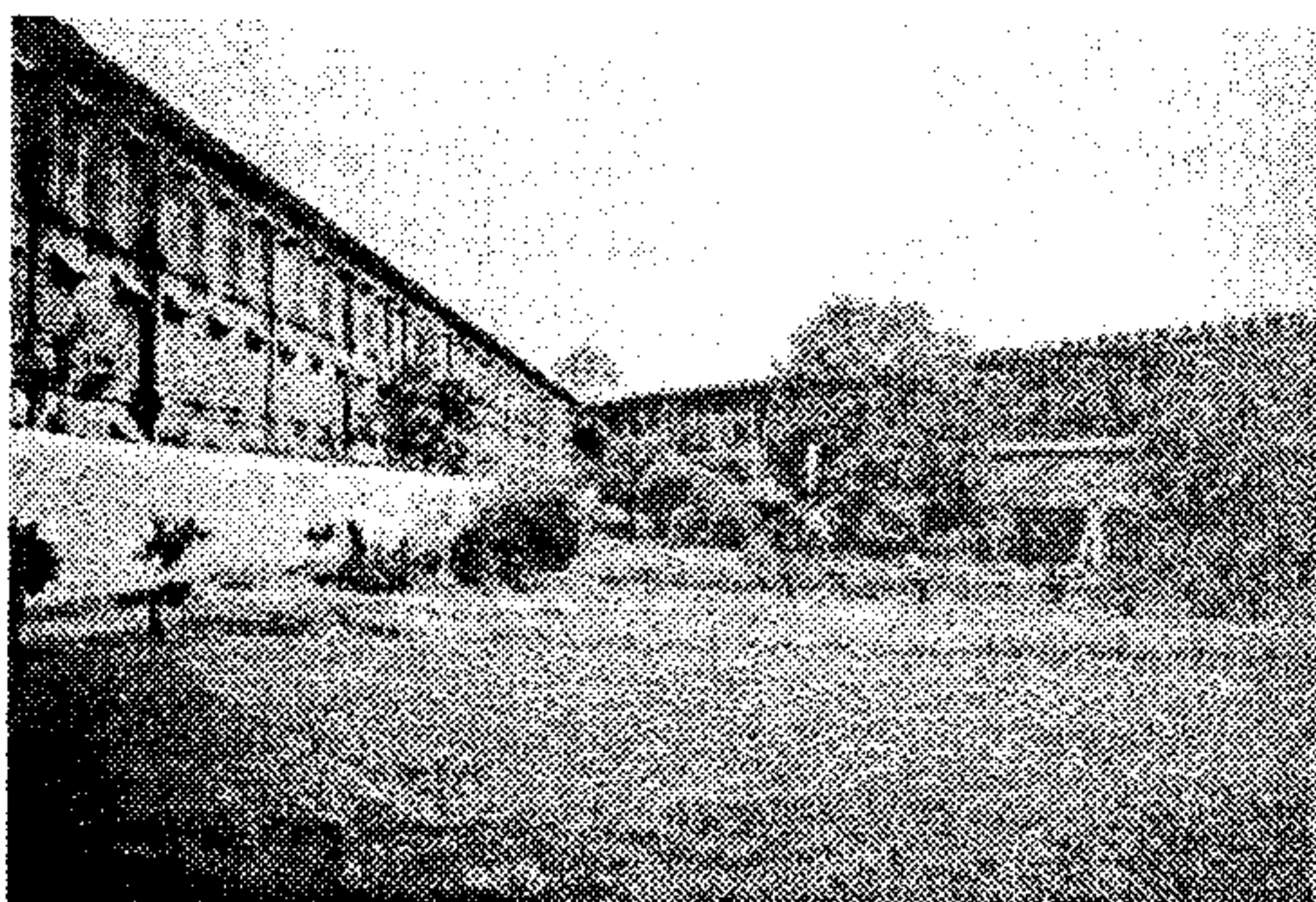
There are places around Port Blair suitable for excursion. Ross Island, hardly a kilometre across the channel, was once the seat of British power. Once in the hub of activity, it is now in ruins. Agricultural farm and sports complex at Shippignat lie on the way to Wandoor Marine National Park. Viper Island, which once harboured condemned female convicts, with gallows on top of a hillock is approachable by boat. Havelock

Island, needing nearly a four-hour cruise from Port Blair, is an ideal spot on the beautiful and quiet beaches with a pollution-free environment. Facilities for camping are available near Radhanagar beach. This island is now a predominantly Bengali settlement.

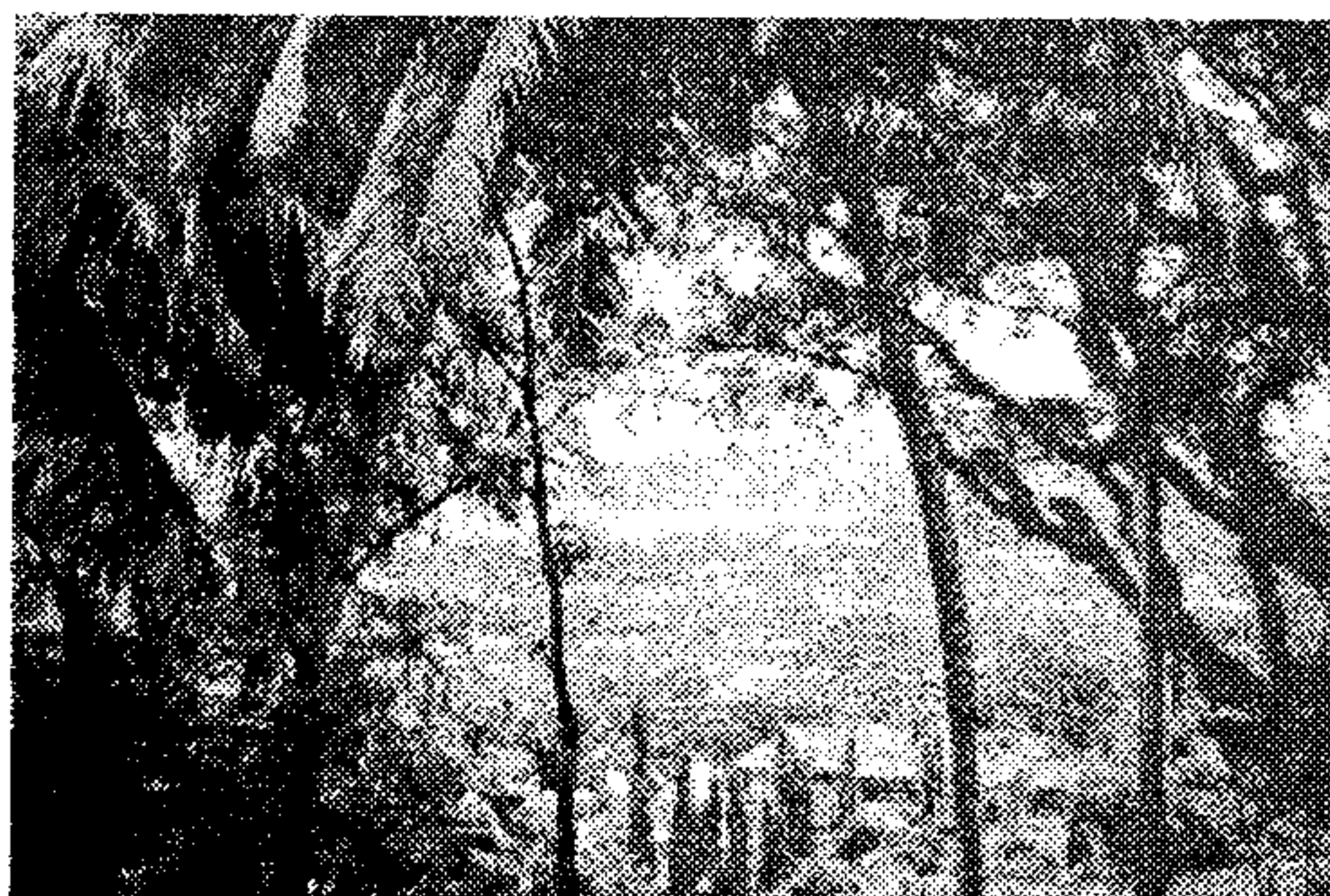
From Mount Harriet (1,200 ft) a commanding view of the Port Blair Harbour, township and the Ross Island can be had. Sunset, in all its splendour, can also be seen here and at Chiriyap at a distance of 30 kms from the town. If one wishes to see under-water multi-coloured coral rocks, a visit to the Red Skin and Jolly Buoy islands is a must.

The Ramakrishna Mission

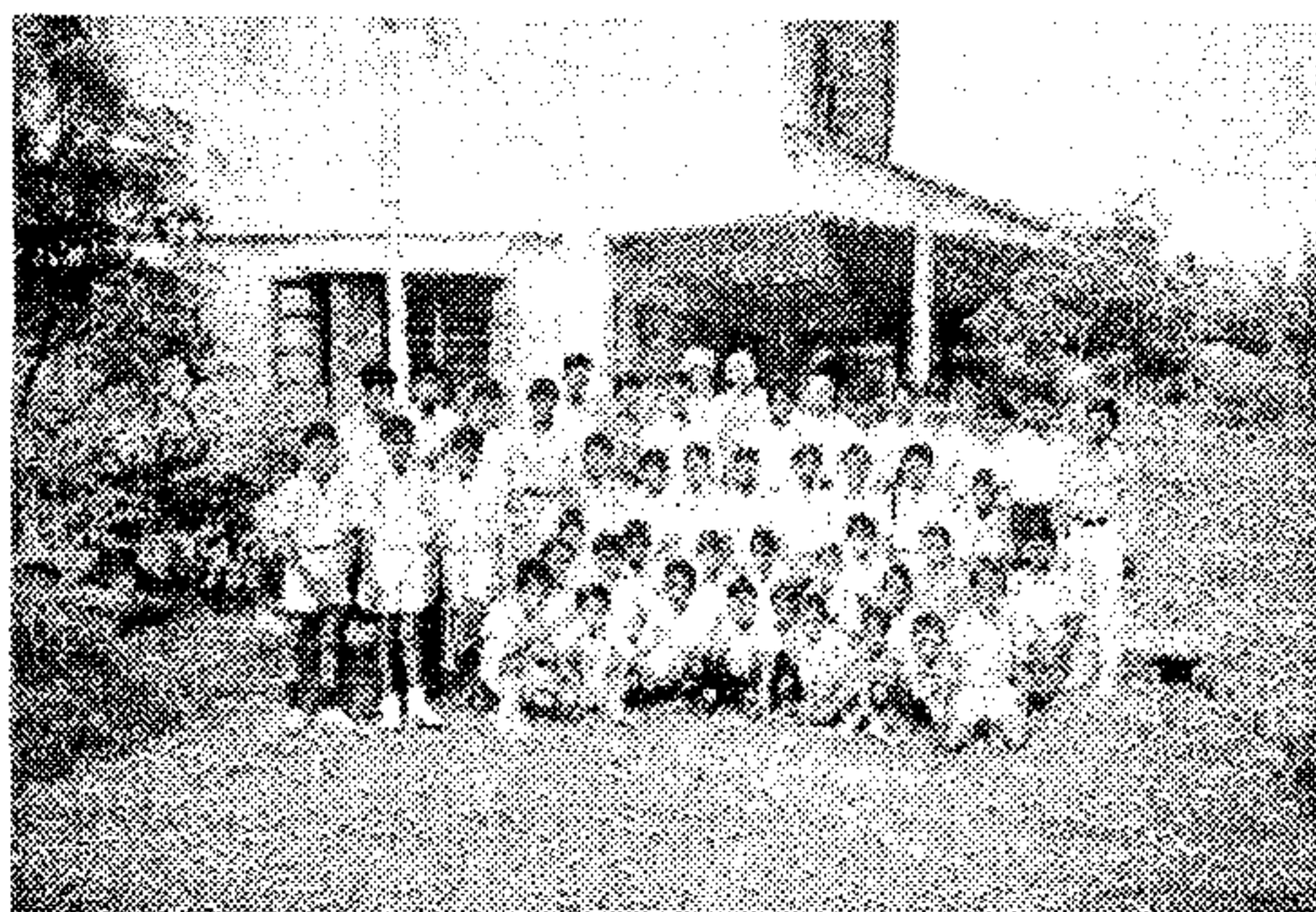
Today, Andamans is the melting pot of people from all parts of India, speaking different languages and practising different religions. A special mention must be made of the centre of the Ramakrishna Mission at Port Blair. Started as an orphanage nearly three decades ago, the centre was affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission in 1992. Within three years it has multiplied its activities and has gained for itself a prestigious position on the religious and cultural map of this area. Through this centre the Mission aims at disseminating the lofty spiritual and cultural heritage of India. Swami Vivekananda, the illustrious founder of the Ramakrishna Mission, wanted actualization of the twin ideals of renunciation and service. The members associated with the centre, therefore, aim at striving for one's own liberation and striving for the welfare of humanity through service to man in the spirit of worship of God. Specifically, the Mission aims to develop the local human resources by providing all-round education. Further, it aims to engender in the younger generation the belief that they belong to India, a great nation with a rich cultural and spiritual heritage. Rightly Port Blair is looked upon as 'Mini



Cellular Jail, Port Blair (Inside View)



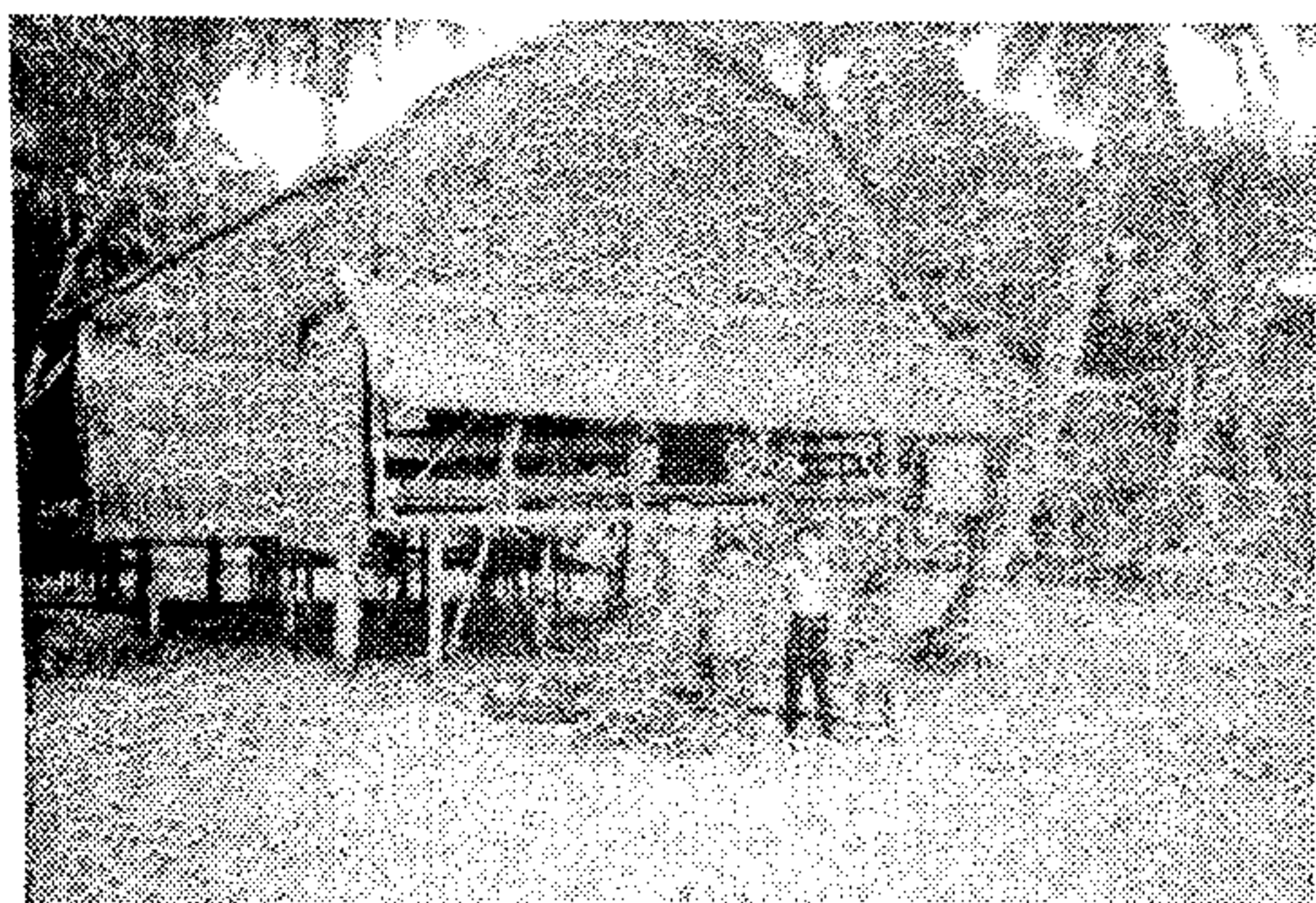
A View of Port Blair Town



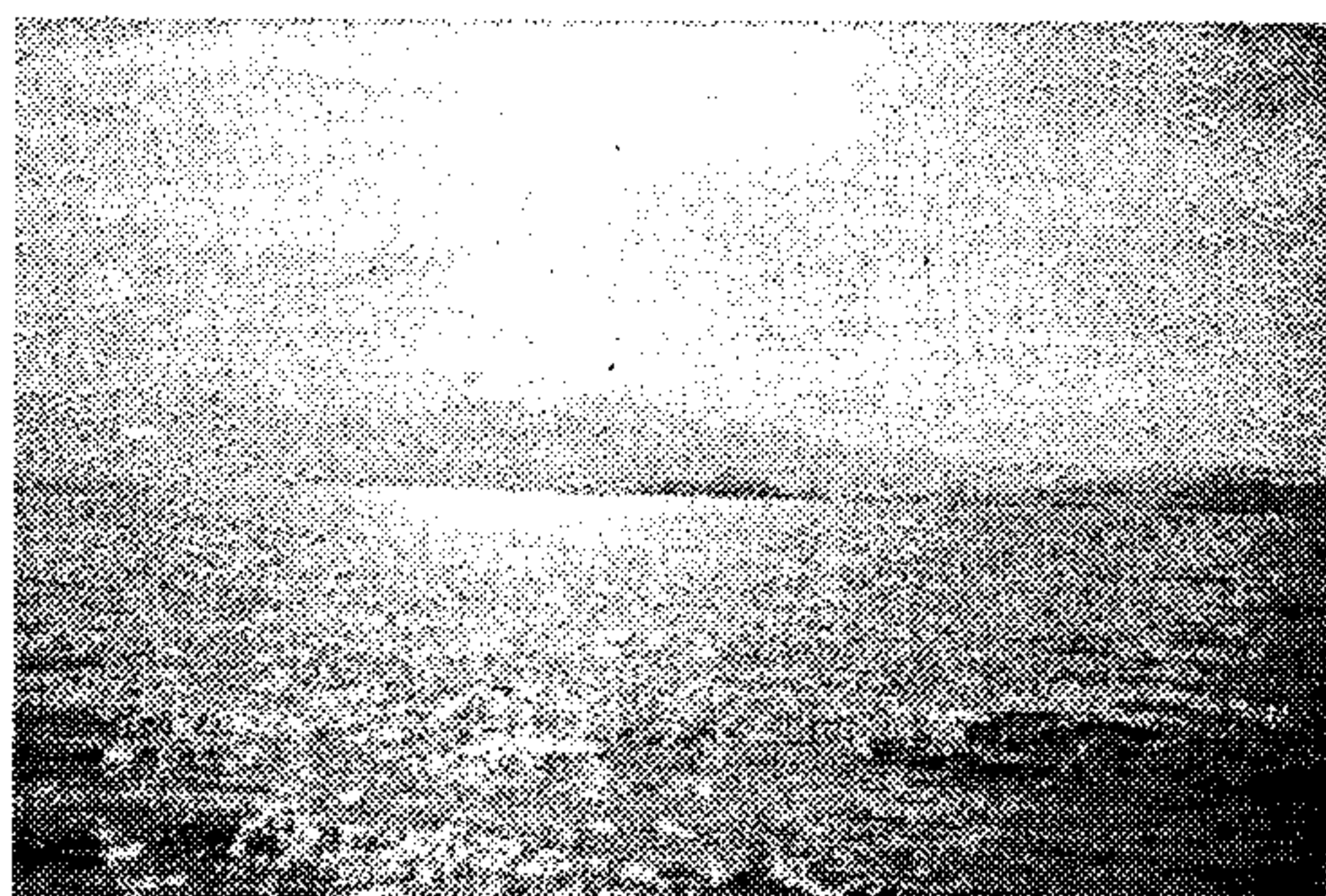
*Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair
Swamis with students of the Orphanage*



Sunset at Car Nicobar



Nicobar Hut, Great Nicobar



Saddle Peak from the North Andaman Sea

India' on account of its being representative of the rich traditions of the people of India.

Activities of the Mission presently consist of a Boys' Home with fifty inmates (some orphans, some destitute) who receive free education, board and lodging. With this as the nucleus, the Mission has a blueprint for expanding the activities to include:

1. *A Vocational Training Centre* with carpentry, cane-craft, electrical wiring, tailoring and bakery units,
2. *A School of Languages* wherein a working knowledge of major Indian and foreign languages will be imparted. With the increase in immigration, trade and travel, people so trained will find better job opportunities.
3. *A Cultural Centre for Children* which will aim at instilling in children a love for self-discipline and a lofty outlook.
4. *A Coaching Centre for Examinations Conducted on All-India Basis* which will prepare young people for these examinations.
5. *A Library* with three sections, viz. General Library with a free reading room, Reference Library for students, and a Children's Section.
6. *An Auditorium* for conducting seminars, youth conventions, scriptural discourses and cultural programmes.

It is hoped that the different units will start functioning soon.

The Group of Islands

The Andaman and Nicobar group comprises of 223 islands, small and large, arranged in a semicircular shape like a garland of pearls. These are in fact a chain of mountain peaks extending from New Guinea, Borneo, Indonesia, Great Nicobar, Car Nicobar, Little Andamans, South, Middle and North Andamans, and a smaller group of islands extending to the Arakan range of

Myanmar.

The islands of the Andaman and Nicobar group are two distinct groups of islands separated by the ten degree channel. They extend over 725 kms in the Bay of Bengal with an area of 3215 square miles. Except Car Nicobar, all other islands are mountains. There is at least one active volcano among the islands. Of these islands only some are inhabited.

Due to the strategic location in the Bay, the naval importance of the Andamans is immense. There is a mention of these islands even in the *Ramayana*. The name Andaman has probably been derived from Marco Polo's Angamanian. Ptolemy referred to it as the islands of Good Spirit. Indian merchants preferred to call it 'Dark Pearl'. The word 'dark' or 'kāla' has probably come from the dark water of the very deep sea around (kālapāni). During the Second World War Netaji visited these islands and named them Sahid and Swaraj islands.

In the seventeenth century the Marathas had conquered the islands. Then came the Portugese and the Dutch followed by the British. The first British settlement was established in 1789 when Captain Archibald Blair, along with his followers, came from Bengal and settled down in the Chatham island. After the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the British Government sent the first batch of freedom fighters to the 'kālapāni' in 1858. During the Second World War the Japanese took control over the island and handed it over to Netaji's Indian National Army on the 6th of November 1943. The Indian tricolour flag was hoisted for the first time at Port Blair on the 30th of November 1943. This freedom however was short-lived as the British reconquered it in 1945.

The Inhabitants

The islands were originally inhabited

by six tribal communities belonging to Mongoloid and Negroid races. The ferocious Jarawas numbering about 250 live in the western hills and forests of the South Andamans. The Great Andamanese tribe inhabits the Strait Island. The Sentinelese live in the Sentinel Island. About a hundred 'On-ges', bare-bodied and painted all over, live in the Little Andaman Island. Even today, these tribes live almost in isolation and subsist on hunting alone. They do not like the 'civilized' men and shoot at them with long arrows smeared with poison.

In the Nicobar group, 25,000 Nicobarese of Mongoloid origin have taken to agriculture as a way of living. They are mostly educated and some of them serve in the Government offices and in the Army. In the Great Nicobar Island nearly 200 'Shompens' continue to live in their aboriginal life-style.

Along with these tribal communities also live the descendants of the persons deported from the mainland, presently known as the 'local born'. Also there are a large number of refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan and Myanmar. More than a lakh of Sri Lankan refugees have also settled down during the last ten years. In spite of this influx of population, one does not come across beggars anywhere. Crime and communal violence is almost absent despite the broad spectrum of the population.

Any account of the visit to these Islands

will be incomplete without a reference to Point Pygmalion, now known as Indira Point, the southern most part of the country 6° North of Equator. It is in the Great Nicobar Island and 55 kms away from Campbell Bay, the harbour and the administrative headquarters of the island. On a clear night one can see, from atop the lighthouse installed there, the bright light on the coast of Sumatra. The island of Sumatra is only 92 nautical miles across the deep channel in the Indian Ocean which serves as the trunk route for seafaring vessels going to Far East such as Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and across the Pacific Ocean.

The charm of Andaman and Nicobar Islands is unique since there is no parallel to it anywhere on the mainland. It is surrounded by the ocean on all the sides. Bright sunshine and heavy rainfall alternate everyday almost throughout the year. Temperate climate and a ceaseless cool and soothing sea-breeze are the chief characteristics. The deep blue waters of the Bay of Bengal beneath the clear blue sky greet the eyes everywhere. Lonely beaches—clean and silvery—, the sight of multi-coloured fish at play near the under-sea vegetation and of coral rocks through transparent water, have their own irresistible charm. Chirping of countless birds, known and unknown, greet the ears everywhere. One would feel that Nature has built up these beautiful islands gradually, stage after stage, with the deft hands of a master sculptor. □

A certain monk went to the temple of Jagannath at Puri. He had doubts as to whether God is with form or without form. When he saw the holy image, he desired to examine it and settle his doubt. He passed his staff from the left to the right in order to feel if it touched the image. For a time he could not see anything or feel anything with the staff. So he decided that God was without form. When he was about to pass the staff from the right to the left, it touched the image. So the monk decided that God is both with form and without form.

—*Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 173

An Expectant Mother and Father

P. SHNEIDRE

(Continued from the June 1997 issue)

Without exception, the religious books of every culture depict the parents of great souls undergoing unique experiences of their own at about the time their children were born. In the Hindu Epic *Ramayana* we read that the mother of Sri Ramachandra, as well as each of the mothers of his three half-brothers, became pregnant by eating milk pudding out of a sacrificial vessel. And they supposedly came to know, from experiences before and after the births of their sons, that these children were carriers of spiritual power and were in fact parts of Vishnu, Lord and Keeper of the universe. The parents of Sri Krishna are said to have felt, both as they conceived him and immediately after his birth, that he was God; and the *Bhagavata* and other Puranas tell of many strange occurrences from the moment Krishna was born that strengthened his parents' belief that he was indeed the bearer of the 'six divine powers.' Before Buddha's birth, his mother had the impression of an exalted being entering her womb, taking the form of a shining snow-white elephant—with Indra and all the other gods acknowledging her good fortune. Prior to Jesus's birth, without having been intimate with Joseph, Mary was filled with a spiritual radiance she had never known before and knew intuitively that she would have a child. The mother of Shankara knew she was to have a child when Mahadeva, God of gods, came to her in a vision and granted her wish. From *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* and other books we learn that Sachidevi, Chaitanya's mother, had similar experiences.

Divine Legends: To Accept or Reject?

Followers of all the different religions, who normally find so much to quarrel over,

all acknowledge that the easiest way to God's grace is to worship Him with intense love. But even if we accept that God is to be loved and worshipped, we still need to know what sort of entity we are loving and worshipping—and, thus, which of the traditional divine legends to accept or reject. Is it unreasonable to assume that at least some of the visions and experiences ascribed to the parents of great souls might be true? After all, children of good moral character are not usually born into families which are totally devoid of similar qualities; why, then, is it so far-fetched to assume that the parents of a Krishna, a Buddha, or a Jesus would have above-average spiritual aptitude? In fact it is evident that by the time these remarkable infants were born, their parents were living beyond human consciousness and could easily have been capable of experiencing the visions ascribed to them. But, although examples abound in the scriptures, some of them quite plausible, the human mind wants only to believe what it sees, smells, hears, tastes or touches; the possible validity behind such rumours as the Self and God—not to mention liberation and a life after death—is downplayed. But does an impartial investigator ignore all testimony outside his personal experience, or does he collect all the evidence—*pro* and *contra* as the case may be—and arrange to make an objective judgement?

We have heard that the parents of our subject also experienced, around the time of his birth, certain unusual visions and experiences. The integrity of our sources is unquestionable, and we have little alternative but to set down their reports as we heard them.

Mothering the Gods

On his return from Gaya, Kshudiram told no one about his strange dream, waiting instead to see what would happen. The first thing he noticed was a change in his wife, who now seemed more a goddess than a woman. A universal love springing from some hidden source seemed to fill Chandradevi's soul, lifting her above worldly desire. She was worrying more about the needs of her neighbours than her own. In the midst of her housework she would suddenly go out to attend to her neighbours. Unobserved, she would take food from her own pantry and give it to the hungry. After finishing the worship of Raghuvir and serving food to her own husband and children, she would go, regardless of how late it had gotten, to see whether all the neighbours had gotten enough to eat. If she happened to encounter someone who, for whatever reason, had gone without food, she would insist on taking him home and feeding him her own dinner. She would take whatever leftovers she could find for herself and be quite content for the rest of the day.

Chandra had always loved the neighbourhood children as her own. But now, Kshudiram began to notice that she seemed to feel this same motherly love for the gods as well! She looked upon Raghuvir, the family deity, as her son; she thought of the goddess Sitala and the god Rameswar, too, as her own children. In the past, as she worshipped and served these deities in the Hindu fashion, her heart had filled with the traditional reverence of the worshipper; now reverence was gone, replaced by love. In her attitude toward the gods, all fear and hesitation had disappeared; now she had nothing to ask of them and nothing to hide. Instead, she felt even closer to them than to her own children and experienced a motherly instinct to sacrifice herself for their happiness. She felt the ecstasy of being bound to the gods in an eternal relation.

Kshudiram also noticed that because of

her carefree devotion to the gods and the joy arising from her intimate relationship with them, the already simple-hearted Chandra had become more trusting than ever. She could no longer harbour any suspicions or treat anyone like a stranger. Kshudiram didn't feel that this essentially selfish world could appreciate such innocence for what it was; in fact, he thought his wife would be called foolish—or worse. He began to look for an opportunity to warn her, and it wasn't long before he found one.

A Strange Dream or Two

Chandra was so guileless that she couldn't keep anything from her husband. After all, she reminded herself, she even confided her thoughts to her friends—so how could she hide them from the most important person in her life? Kshudiram returned from Gaya, and over the next couple of days Chandradevi told him everything she had seen or felt while he was gone. And one day she said, 'When you were away, I had a strange dream. A luminous god was in bed with me. At first I thought it was you, and I was so happy! I didn't think of asking how you'd gotten into the room with the door bolted. But then I realized it wasn't a human being at all, and I woke up. But I still had the feeling that someone else was in the room. I thought to myself, *Does a god ever appear to a human like this?* Then I started to wonder if some wicked person had come into the room for an evil purpose; I thought maybe the sound of his footsteps had created the dream. I became frightened. I quickly got up and lit a lamp, but there was no one else in the room and the door was still bolted from inside. But I stayed awake the rest of the night, because I was afraid. I asked myself if anyone could have come into the room by somehow removing the bolt and then run away when he realized I was awake. As soon as it was morning, I sent for Dhani and Prasanna, and after telling them everything, I said "Do you think a man really came into my room? I have no quarrel

with anyone in the village—though I did have a little argument with Madhu Jugi the other day. Could he have come into my room, just to get back at me?” Dhani and Prasanna just laughed and teased me. They said, “You silly woman! Has old age affected your brain? Why do you talk that way about your dream? Think what other people would say if they heard about it. There’d be a scandal. You’ll be ridiculed if you mention it to anybody again.” Hearing them calling it my “dream” made me think, “Oh, then it *was* really just a dream.” I promised myself not to tell anyone else except you.

‘Another time I was talking to Dhani in front of the temple of the Jugis and I suddenly saw a heavenly light coming from the image of Shiva. It filled the temple and rushed towards me in waves. I was just going to tell Dhani about it, when all of a sudden it surrounded me and came into my body. I was shocked. I fainted. Afterwards, when Dhani was helping me, I told her all about it. First she believed me, but then she tried to tell me I’d had an epileptic fit. But I feel that the light has been inside me ever since, and that I’m pregnant. I told this to Dhani and Prasanna, but they made fun of me and criticized me. Dhani told me I was hallucinating, and Prasanna said I was sick. They told me not to tell anyone about it. And so far I haven’t. What do you think? Was it the grace of God, or am I really sick? Even now, I have the feeling that I’m pregnant.’

Kshudiram, remembering his own dream at Gaya, listened quietly to everything Chandra said. He replied, ‘From now on, don’t talk about such visions and experiences to anyone except me. Don’t worry. Whatever Raghuvir shows by His grace is for our good. During my stay at Gaya, Gadadhar revealed to me, in a supernatural way, that a son would be born to us.’ These words soothed Chandradevi, and thereafter she put her trust entirely in Raghuvir. Three or four months later, it was no longer a secret that Chandradevi, though past 45, had be-

come pregnant again. The grace and loveliness that women are said to gain while pregnant were seen in Chandradevi, and Dhani and other women of the village remarked that she appeared lovelier this time than on previous occasions. As the news spread, some of them began to whisper: ‘Imagine a woman conceiving at her age and looking so sweet! She might even die at the time of delivery.’

‘Is It Some Disease?’

Day by day, Chandradevi’s spiritual visions and experiences became more numerous. It is said that at this time her visions of gods and goddesses occurred almost daily. At times, she was aware of a purifying fragrance coming from these holy beings and spreading through the house, or she would hear celestial voices and be struck with wonder. It is also said that at this time her heart overflowed with motherly love for all the gods and goddesses. Almost every day she would tell her husband about these visions and experiences and ask why they should come to her. Kshudiram comforted her in various ways and asked her to accept what was happening to her. One day (following the Bengali custom of addressing one’s husband without using his given name) she said to him, ‘O revered one, there is no end to the number of gods and goddesses who have shown themselves to me from time to time, ever since the day I saw the light in front of the Shiva temple. Many of these gods are ones I’ve never seen before, not even in pictures. Today, I saw a god riding on the back of a swan. At first I was shocked, but then I started to feel sorry for him because his face looked sunburned. I called to him and said, ‘O dear little god riding a swan, your face is getting red from the sun. I have some cold rice from yesterday; come, eat a little and refresh yourself before you go on.’ He heard me and smiled, but then he started to fade away and I couldn’t see him any more. I see many such forms. I don’t worship or meditate on them,

and yet I see them at any time of day or night. Sometimes they come before me in human shape, and then dissolve into thin air. Can you tell me why I see all this? Is it some disease? They say that Sukhlal Goswami's ghost is living in the Bakul tree out front; sometimes I wonder if I am possessed by it.' Kshudiram reminded her of his dream at Gaya, and pointed out how fortunate she was to be carrying the supreme Lord in her womb, whose purifying influence was surely the impetus for the spiritual visions. Chandradevi had absolute faith in her husband's words, and now they filled her heart with devotion. Her strength renewed, she stopped worrying.

It should be pointed out that Chandra was no stranger to visions even prior to this pregnancy. Indeed, the seeing of visions was a peculiarity that could almost be said to have run in the family. One notable episode took place shortly before Ramkumar was married, when at fifteen he was studying in a Sanskrit school and also helping the family by performing worship in private homes. During the month of Asvin, he had gone to a house at Bhursubo to perform the evening worship of the goddess Lakshmi. Past midnight her son hadn't returned, and a restless Chandra went outside to wait for him. As she looked in the direction from which she assumed he would come, a lone figure approached by the field path from Bhursubo to Kamarpukur. Assuming it was her son, she went happily to meet him. But as the figure drew near she saw that it was not Ramkumar at all but an extraordinarily beautiful girl wearing jewels. Chandra was preoccupied enough with concern for her son that the sight of a respectable girl walking in the dead of night didn't strike her as odd. She approached the girl and said, 'Where do you come from, my child?' The girl answered, 'From Bhursubo.' Chandra asked, 'Did you see my son, Ramkumar? Is he coming back?' Apparently it didn't even occur to Chandra

to ask herself whether an absolute stranger like this girl could possibly know her son. Comfortingly, the girl replied, 'I have just come from the house where your son went to perform worship. Don't worry—he'll return to you soon.' On hearing this, Chandra felt relieved and at the same time started to become more observant. Noticing the girl's remarkable beauty and her unusual dress and ornaments, and hearing the sweetness of her voice, Chandra suddenly said, 'You are so young! Where are you going at this time of the night wearing such fine ornaments and clothing? And what strange jewel is your earring made from?' With a smile the girl replied, 'It is called a *Kundala*,' and added, 'I still have a long way to go.' It occurred to Chandra that the girl might be in some sort of trouble. She said, 'Come, my child; rest at our house tonight and then go at your leisure tomorrow.' 'No, mother,' replied the girl, 'I must go now. I will come to your house some other time. She left, going towards a few bundles of rice paddy belonging to the Lahas. Chandra, surprised to see the girl going that way rather than following the regular path, thought she must have lost her way. She followed, but was unable to find the girl. She searched in every direction. Then, reconsidering all that this 'girl' had said, it suddenly dawned on Chandra: Perhaps she had just seen the goddess Lakshmi! She ran quickly to her husband and told him everything, in great excitement, from beginning to end. After hearing the story in detail, Kshudiram assured her that there was no doubt that the divine goddess Lakshmi had graciously revealed herself.

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Time rolled on. Surrendering themselves completely to Raghuvir, this virtuous couple spent their days in the expectation of beholding, as their son, the divine Being whose presence had been quietly deepening their devotion. □

Celebration of the Centenaries of: The Foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission and Swamiji's Lectures at Almora after His Triumphant Return from the West—First Phase:

1 May to 16 May 1997

For the celebration of the Centenaries of (i) the foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission, and (ii) Swamiji's lectures at Almora after his triumphant return from the West, a Centenary Celebration Committee with most of the important citizens of Almora as members and Sri B. D. Pandey (ex-Governor of Punjab and West Bengal) as the President was formed. The educational sub-committee organized competitions on essay writing, elocution, recitation and quiz, based on Swami Vivekananda's life and teachings, in most of the educational institutions of Almora town. About 300 students took active part in these competitions.

On 1 May 1997, the foundation day of Ramakrishna Mission, there were special puja, *havana*, discussions on Swamiji and distribution of *prasad* at the Ramakrishna Kutir. About 150 persons attended the function and took *prasad*.

The final competitions of the inter-school and -college were held at Ramakrishna Kutir on the 2nd and 3rd May, 1997.

In commemoration of Swamiji's coming to Almora after his triumphant return from the West, an impressive and colourful procession with several vehicles carrying exquisitely decorated portraits of Swamiji was organized on 11 May 1997. From Lodhia (8 kms. from Almora), the procession wended on its way to the **Ratneswar Temple** on the Alexander Lane near Paltan Bazar. As it passed through the main bazar, women from the tops of their houses showered flowers on the portrait of Swamiji, and the air resounded with the shouts of 'Victory to Swami Vivekananda'.

Proceeding from the Paltan Bazar via Thana Bazar and Jauhari Mohalla, the procession reached **Raghunath Temple**, where the procession in honour of Swamiji was received by many children and dignitaries. The procession thereafter glided to the historic **Khajanchi Mohalla**, where a hundred years ago a public meeting was held in honour of Swamiji, and, in reply, Swamiji had delivered a famous, thought-provoking lecture. The procession was received in traditional

Kumaoni style: women waved *arati* to Swamiji and sang *mangalik*. In a meeting held this year at this place in commemoration of the event, the Municipality Chairman of Almora Town, Pandit Prakash Chandra Joshi, read out the address of welcome which the Almora citizens, through Sri Chatrapati Joshi (then Hon'ble Governor), had presented to Swamiji in 1897 [then read out by Pandit Jwala Dutt Joshi], hailing the Swami as a great saint and thanking him for holding aloft the glory of the *Sanatana Dharma* at the Chicago Parliament of Religions. The address further stated that faith and devotion had been kindled in the residents of Almora upon the Swami's being in their midst, and expressed hope that they would be recipients of the blessings of Swamiji. Swami Nikhileswarananda, Editor of *Sri Ramakrishna Jyot*, a monthly journal of the Order in Gujarati, read out the lecture given by Swamiji at that spot a hundred years ago.

The procession terminated at **Ramsay Inter College**, where a public meeting was organized. More than one thousand people took part in the procession and more than five hundred attended the meetings. The meeting commenced with Vedic chanting by *brahmacharins* and *bhajan* by the boys of Bharat Khande Vidyalaya. Dr. D.N. Tiwari conducted the meeting. Swami Rudratmanandaji from the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama at Varanasi was the Chairperson and Swami Nikhileswarananda was the Chief Guest. Both the Swamis spoke in this meeting.

Addressing the meeting at Ramsay Inter College, Swami Nikhileswarananda said that though Sankaracharya brought out the spiritual treasures from the Upanishads to men of renunciation living in forests and caves, it was Swamiji who brought it to the door of the masses in a form that could find practical application in the lives of everyone, whatever his or her station in life might be. Almora in the Kumaon region was visited thrice by Swamiji during his lifetime and apparently found his favour. To devotees therefore Almora is always a place of inspiration. It was near Kakrighat on the bank of river Koshi, the speaker said, that Swamiji had the mystic experience which led him to state that the macrocosm and the microcosm were built on the same plan—a truth which today's science confirms by saying that the secret of the macrocosm lies embedded in the microcosm. Swami Nikhileswarananda also remembered on this occasion the late Zulfikar Ali, a fakir, who had saved Swamiji's life

on one of his visits to Almora. The Swami also remembered the late Lala Badri Shah, much devoted to Swamiji. It was by erecting memorials at places visited by Swamiji and by forming organizations in Swamiji's name consisting of eminent citizens devoted to social service activities that Swami Vivekananda's memory could be kept alive, said Swami Nikhileswarananda.

Sri Prakash Chandra Joshi, Municipality Chairman, announced the decision to call the day 'Vivekananda Day' and said that the task accomplished by Swamiji could not be termed a mere human deed. He believed that Swamiji had incarnated himself only to fulfil the well-known assertion of Sri Krishna that He will take birth in every age. Expressing gratitude to all the noble souls engaged in the dissemination of the message of Swamiji to people at large, Sri Joshi read out an address of welcome to the Most Revered President of the Ramakrishna Order at Belur expressing therein the hope that the work at Almora would continue for ever. He placed the address in the hands of Swami Siddhidanandaji Maharaj and requested him to send it to Belur Math on behalf of the citizens of Almora.

Swami Siddhidanandaji, thanked all the participants for their enthusiastic participation in the procession and the meetings and said that according to the wishes of Swami Vivekananda, the centre at Almora was a retreat centre for the monks in the world-wide Ramakrishna Order, since it was here that Swamiji had had the spiritual experience relating to macrocosm and microcosm proving thereby that the place was highly suitable for acquiring spiritual knowledge and peace.

Swami Rudratmanandaji of the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama at Varanasi, who presided over the function, threw light on Swamiji's idea of patriotism and freedom from superstition, and explained the relevance of Swamiji's message in the present-day context.

Some student-competitors who had obtained the first position in various competitions displayed their performance on this occasion. Books, laminated photographs and other religious articles were given away as prizes. Every participant was given a certificate.

The descendants (Panna, Girish, Vinode, Madan Lal, Brijraj and Sankar Lal) of the late Lala Badri Shah at whose house Swamiji had stayed, (Kum. Vrinda Joshi) of Pandit Jwala Dutt Joshi who was associated with the Ramakrishna Movement in its early days, and (Munni) of Zulfikar Ali who had saved Swamiji's life on one occasion, were honoured in the meeting with the presentation of big laminated photographs of Swamiji and books.

Concluding the speeches, Sri B.D. Pandey thanked all assembled in the meeting. The meeting came to an end with a brief musical performance by the local radio artists. Swami Siddhidanandaji, President of Ramakrishna Kutir at Almora, monks, brahmacharins and a large number of students and dignitaries participated in the procession and meetings.

On 12 May, a meeting was organized for the students and staff of the Government Girls' Inter College where Swami Rudratmanandaji and Swami Nikhileswarananda delivered lectures. On 13 May, a meeting was held in the Government Inter College. Some of the students and staff of the college attended the meeting. Dr. K.C. Joshi, pro-Vice-Chancellor of Kumaon University, presided over the meeting. Swami Rudratmanandaji and Swami Nikhileswarananda addressed the meeting.

Youth conventions were organized on the 14th and 15th May for boys and girls respectively. Both the conventions were conducted by Swami Nikhileswarananda. Swami Rudratmanandaji and Swami Nikhileswarananda spoke on both occasions. About 90 boys and 200 girls participated in the deliberations. Munni, the great grand-daughter of Zulfikar Ali who had saved Swamiji's life by offering a cucumber, attended the camp on the 15th and was presented with a small purse of Rupees one thousand.

The 2-day convention started in the morning with Vedic chanting and continued till 4 pm. 'Given today's social, political, economic and religious environment, how could the youth build up their lives and how could they contribute towards the welfare of the nation during the present troubled times' was the topic discussed by Swami Nikhileswarananda. Drawing upon various incidents in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the Swami said that if a person tried to see the divine in the poor, the helpless, the uneducated and the invalid and served them with the attitude of worship, then this very earth will become transformed into heaven. He further said that Sri Ramakrishna had practised the disciplines of all major religions and come to the conclusion that religious systems were not contradictory, they were essentially one which expressed itself in a variety of ways to suit the tastes and temperaments of people. It is the labelling of religions that leads to avoidable conflict. The present-day educational system needed modification so that stress is laid on character-building and man-making. Answering questions put to him during the question-answer session, the Swami said that concentration of mind depended on purity of mind which depended on purity of food intake. By

food was meant, he said, both the food taken through the mouth and the food taken in by the sense organs. He emphasized the education of women and the improvement of their condition pointing out that even after fifty years of independence 35 per cent of India's population were illiterate of which 53 percent were women. The Swami spoke elaborately on meditation and yoga. After the discussion the participants spent about ten minutes in meditation.

Swami Rudratmanandaji Maharaj also spoke asking the youth to drive out of their minds all sense of weakness by keeping the bright examples in India's long history. Even today one had in Dr. Kiran Bedi and in Bachendri Pal Sarikhi of Uttarakhand such bright examples of women whom one could emulate to make progress in all avenues of life. Concluding the 2-day convention Swami Siddhidanandaji Maharaj distributed suitable gifts and wished the youth a good and pure life requesting them to read well the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda to make their individual and collective lives fruitful.

There was a retreat for the grown-ups on the 16th May. About 90 persons took part in this retreat conducted by Swami Rudratmananda. Swamis Nikhileswarananda and Srikantananda of the Ramakrishna Math at Hyderabad, spoke on this occasion. Swami Siddhidananda explained some ślokas from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Some local radio artistes sang beautiful *bhajans* and created a serene atmosphere. In all the functions held, Swami Siddhidananda expressed his thanks to all the participants for their enthusiastic response.

Celebration of the Centenaries of Swami Vivekananda's Return to India and Founding of Ramakrishna Mission

On Sunday 25 May 1997, a meeting presided over by Swami Nikhileswaranandaji, Editor of *Sri Ramakrishna Jyot*, a monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order in Gujarati, was organized at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. Sri Devesh Chaturvedi (District Magistrate), and Sri Om Prakash Arya (Sub-District Magistrate) of Pithoragarh District graced the occasion. The meeting started at 10 am. with chanting of Vedic *mantras* and *stotras*. This was followed at 11.45 a.m. by a welcome address by Revered Swami Mumukshanandaji Maharaj, President of Advaita Ashrama. Thereafter, Swami Nikhileswarananda, the Sub-District Magistrate and the District Magistrate spoke on the occasion. Sri Roop Singh Bora (*Pramukh* of Barahkot Block) presented the vote of thanks. The meeting was

followed by mass feeding of the participants from nearby villages.

The Ramakrishna Mission at Agartala celebrated the Centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission and that of Swamiji's return to India on 1 May. Colourful processions from different localities of the town wending their way through several important roads of Agartala converged on the Ashrama premises. A public meeting was held at Agartala Town Hall in the afternoon. Sri Samar Choudhury, Home Minister, Dr. Braja Gopal Roy, Minister for Civil Supplies, Govt. of Tripura, and some other dignitaries addressed the gathering. The Home Minister initiated the distribution of 100 clothes to the needy at the end of the meeting. Devotional songs were sung by noted artistes in the Ashrama's temple.

The Ramakrishna Math at Hyderabad organized special puja, feeding of the poor, a Telugu drama, devotional music, and a public meeting on 1 May. Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji gave a brief benedictory address. The Hon'ble Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh, Sri Prabha Shankar Mishra, and some eminent persons, and a large number of devotees took part in the celebrations.

At Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama at Kalady, a convention of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was held on 1 May. Special puja was performed and over 100 poor Harijans were given new clothes. Several distinguished persons attended the gathering.

At Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Malda, Revered Swami Gahananandaji inaugurated the year-long Centenary Celebrations and spoke about the associated memorable events on 12 April.

The Ramakrishna Mission Vivēkananda Smriti Mandir at Khetri organized special puja and a public meeting on 1 May. A procession was conducted the following day in which about 200 students and devotees participated. Meetings were also held at Khetri Nagar and Alwar on 3rd and 4th May.

The Ramakrishna Mission at Jaipur held a public meeting, presided over by Sri Baliram Bhagat, Governor of Rajasthan, on 1 May. Special worship to Sri Ramakrishna was performed in the morning and a newly built dispensary building was inaugurated by Sri Bhagat on this occasion.

The Ramakrishna Math at Bangalore inaugurated the Centenary Celebrations on 1 May. *Usha kirtan*, special puja and a public meeting attended by about 2000 persons were organized.

The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Ramharipur held public meetings on its premises and in various places in Durgapur from 11 to 14 April

and on 1 May. A large number of people from various walks of life attended the programme.

At **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Ashrama at Raipur**, special worship was performed on 1 May and a public meeting, well attended and addressed by some distinguished persons, was held on 4 May.

The **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama at Bankura** organized a colourful procession, a public meeting, and readings from Swami Vivekananda's works on 11 May. About 700 persons took part.

On 1 May, the **Ramakrishna Math at Nagpur** performed a special puja to Sri Ramakrishna in the morning and conducted a public meeting.

At **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama at Vrindaban** special puja was performed and about 300 poor people were fed on 1 May.

On 1 May, the **Ramakrishna Mission at Limbdi** performed special worship in the morning and 100 poor people were given 5 Kg. wheat and a *chadar* each. Later in the day, a public meeting was organized.

On 1 and 4 May, the **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Centre at Mangalore** conducted public meetings, well attended and addressed by eminent persons.

The **Ramakrishna Math and Mission Centre at Mumbai** observed the Centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission on 1 May with special puja and homa, and a public meeting in the evening.

As a part of the Centenary Celebrations of the Ramakrishna Mission, the **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Cherrapunjee** organized an eye camp on 20 May which was inaugurated by Dr. F. A. Khonglam, Minister for Excise & Taxation, Government of Meghalaya. The number of patients treated was 265.

The **Ramakrishna Math at Jamtara** organized a Youth Leadership Camp on 21 May attended by 60 youths.

Centenary Celebration

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachi

Second Phase

The first phase of the celebration (see August 1997 issue) was inaugurated on 14 April 1997. The highlight of the second phase, from 15 to 18 May 1997, included: (a) Ramakrishna Mela; Narayan Seva (1800 dhotis, 1800 saris were distributed among the poor to commemorate the first relief work started by Swami Akhandanandaji. There was also mass feeding); A drill exposition (*Abhi*) by school children as Bharatiyam; Religious discourse (Swami Smarananandaji as President, Swamis Shivamayanandaji, Suhitanandaji, Dineshanandaji, Srikanandaji,

Paradevanandaji, Sri Nityaniranjan Kundu—an ex-student—, and Sri Biswaranjan Das—the orphan boy Bhola at the time of Swami Akhandanandaji—addressed a gathering of about 1500; and drama by Sevavrata on 15 May, (b) Cultural programme and drama by students of Sargacchi High School and Primary School, (c) Cultural programme and drama by Baranagore Mission Primary School students, (d) Drama by students of Malda Mission High School and by Chhandik Natya Samstha of Berhampore. There was also a 3-day exhibition by students of Sargachi School from 15 May to 18 May.

OBITUARY

With deep sorrow we announce the passing away of **Swami Swananda** on 25 May at 4.15 p.m. at the Varanasi Home of Service hospital where he had been admitted for a thorough medical checkup. On 18 May he fell down in the room itself and had a deep cut in the forehead which was immediately stitched. He however became unconscious owing to severe haemorrhage in the brain and remained in coma till the end. An initiated disciple of Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, he joined the Order at Belur Math in 1947 and received Sannyasa vows in 1957 from Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj. He served the Ramakrishna Order as the Head of the centres at Patna, Saradapitha, Berkeley (USA), New Delhi and Mayavati. He also served the Order in various capacities at Cherrapunjee, Rangoon Society, and the Headquarters Office. For the last three years he had been leading a retired life at the Varanasi Home of Service. He was held in great respect and admiration by the monks of the Order for his unassuming and austere nature, simplicity, and scholarly pursuits. Coincidentally, on the 25th May, there was the annual *bhandara* for the village people at Mayavati (see previous page). There was also a *bhandara* at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, on 6 June in the Swami's honour, in which monastic members from the centres at Shyamala Tal and Almora participated. □

Look at the swarm of peacocks.
How they dance in joy at the sight of
clouds! Even so a householder feels
delighted at the sight of a devotee of
the Lord, who has renounced the
world.

—Lala Kannoo Mal,
The Sayings of Tulsidas, p. 19

Reviews and Notices

RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHANSA;
Swami Lokeswarananda; publ. Sahitya
Akademi, Rabindra Bhavan, 35
Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi 110 001;
1996; pp. 96; Rs. 15/-.

Here is another important contribution from the facile pen of Swami Lokeswarananda who is the Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta. As very rightly observed in the Introduction to the book, Sri Ramakrishna himself did not write anything, but he has inspired so many Eastern and Western scholars and devotees to write about him. Thus, as mentioned therein, his name was first mentioned in print in the *Indian Mirror*, 28 March 1875 and a full life-sketch of his appeared in *Dharmatattva* on 14 May 1875. From then on, innumerable scholars, thinkers and devotees have attempted to fathom the depth of the personality of Sri Ramakrishna.

In this short book, the biographical details of Sri Ramakrishna are depicted in a comprehensive yet informative style. Ramakrishna's life is viewed in five periods: The early years; At Dakshineswar; the Western challenge which reveals the paradox of visiting western-minded people sitting at the feet of this poor, illiterate, unpolished, ill-clad person; The last days at Dakshineswar and Cossipore.

These five distinct periods of Sri Ramakrishna's life are covered in five succinct chapters. The events of this god-centred life, his sadhana and ecstatic moods, the relationship with his disciples, Sri Sarada Devi, and with his contemporary western-educated persons who were just the antithesis of his, the training given to his disciples, and the significance of his last days for his householder and monastic disciples—everything is handled with commendable compactness. The sixth chapter, 'The Unique Gospel', interestingly describes how Mahendranath Gupta (M.), the author of the *Gospel*, became steeped in Sri Ramakrishna and how the *Gospel* came to be written. It beautifully introduces us to the 'Gospel' itself. Appendix I and II contain excerpts from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and *Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna*. A bibliography appears at the end.

A reading of this sterling, divine-intoxicated life makes us feel that spirituality is neither distant nor foreign but that it is something which is

ever present in the depth of our own consciousness.

Simplicity, directness, precision in the presentation and lucid language so characteristic of Swami Lokeswarananda's writings are the winning edge of the book. This small book will fascinate both those who read about Sri Ramakrishna for the first time and those who have studied his life and teachings in detail.

Dr. Chetana Mandavia
Junagadh

THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA;
originally recorded in Bengali by 'M.', a
disciple of the Master; translated into
English with an Introduction by Swami
Nikhilananda; publ. Sri Ramakrishna
Math, Mylapore, Madras 600 004; 1996;
pp. 1062; Rs. 200/-.

The reviewer feels privileged to review this great monumental book. Essentially, *Gospel* is a verbatim report of Sri Ramakrishna's life and his teachings during the last four and half years of his life told with amazing veracity to detail—to dates, persons and surroundings. His disciple, Mahendranath Gupta ('M.' as he mentions himself in the *Gospel*) who was with him during this period maintained a diary and every detail he heard and saw concerning Sri Ramakrishna, he noted down in his diary. After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, this diary was published in Bengali by 'M.' himself in five parts. The full English translation by Swami Nikhilananda appeared in 1942. Thereafter many editions have come out.

To the reviewer, the *Gospel* is simply unique for it gives a vivid picture of spirituality applied in daily life—the portrait and words of a God-man, every cell of whose body was vibrant and radiant with spiritual realization. Upon a closer study one feels stunned as it is not merely a simple diary where events and conversations are noted but a hagiographic literature, history, biography and philosophy combined. What does the *Gospel* reveal to us?

1. The divine personality of Sri Ramakrishna: We are witness to his transcendental state, his rapturous songs, rhythmic and beautiful dances, his witty conversations with a variety of people, great fun and merry-making with young and

innocent boys, his keen observations and his ability to imitate even a worldly person, his intense detachment and his joyful moods.

2. His method of teaching: By singing, dancing and telling metaphors and parables, he made his point clear. We also get a peep into his limitless love, keen interest and deep sympathy for all who came to him; how he taught people according to their bent of mind, their need and capacity to assimilate, and how meticulously he moulded the lives of Narendra, 'M.' and other disciples. His frequent trances and spells of *blāva-samādhi* convey more than words ever can. In fact, this seems to be a unique instance of teaching through silence and speechless eloquence.

3. The gist of all scriptures like those of the Hindu, Christian, Buddhist and Moslem: It does not teach any particular creed or dogma. It teaches religion in its broadest and truest sense. And the life of Sri Ramakrishna as revealed in the *Gospel* is in itself a living demonstration of what he teaches.

4. We get an idea of Sri Ramakrishna's contemporaries and their encounter with him as also a first hand account of people who came into his contact.

5. The picture of the nineteenth century Calcutta is reconstructed.

6. The real value of the *Gospel* lies in its straight, flawless narrative marked with the wealth of details and vivid descriptions; and amidst all these, 'M.' remains hidden as expressed by Swami Vivekananda in his letter to 'M.', 'Never was the life of a great Teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind. The Socratic dialogues are Plato all over; you are entirely hidden.'

The *Gospel* has become a world-wide spiritual scripture. Its contents give encouragement and inspiration. Its originality, simplicity, profundity, directness and wonderful naturalness have captivated the attention of lakhs of people all over the world. It is an effective medium through which we are face-to-face with divinity imbuing us with faith and a fervour of devotion, offering us solutions to a host of problems.

A comprehensive biography of Sri Ramakrishna appears in the Introduction written by Swami Nikhilananda himself. This enables the readers to become familiar with Sri Ramakrishna's life, his sadhana, his spiritual gurus, his householder, sannyasin and women disciples/devotees and his last days at Cossipore. A chronology of Sri Ramakrishna's life and an exhaustive glossary enhance the value of this elevating book. The English translation is superb and maintains the charming style of the original Bengali narrative. The English edition assumes

greater significance due to its accessibility to a larger cross-section of people.

The get-up and appearance of the book is really royal and 'royal' persons would like to have this to march on the *royal road* to divinity as propounded and preached by Sri Ramakrishna.

Dr. Chetana Mandavia
Junagadh

FRAGRANCE FROM BENGAL; tr. Amal Sarkar; publ. Krishna, Rahara, North 24-Parganas, West Bengal; 1996; pp. 272+xvi; Rs. 160/-.

Bengal is rich in poetry. To make this treasure available to non-Bengali speaking peoples, Amal Sarkar has made a good attempt to translate a few select works of Vidyapati, Chandidas, Jnanadas, Govindadas as also Krishnadas Kaviraj's *Chaitanya Charitamrita*. Sarkar has also translated from Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. One has to be, however, very cautious in placing before the common masses ideas which need very subtle and refined minds to understand and appreciate. A few words about the book itself: With the translation of each poem, the first line of the original has been printed in Bengali characters. This limits the geographical scope of the book. The book needs a thorough editing. Transliteration of Sanskrit terms, footnotes, etc. need more precision. It is hoped that the English-knowing world will, through this book as a preliminary help, try to benefit from the vast resources of Bengali literature.

Swami Sunirmalananda
Belur Math

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA (*Gurumukhi*); Ms. Jasbir Kaur Ahuja; publ. Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala, Punjab; pp. 40, Rs. 12/-.

The contribution of Swami Vivekananda to the spiritual awakening of mankind is of great significance. He became instrumental in spreading the spiritual message of his Guru Sri Ramakrishna. To give practical shape to his ideas on applied Vedanta, he established the Ramakrishna Mission which now has branches all over the world. The attempt of Ms. Jasbir Kaur Ahuja to bring out a biographical sketch of Swamiji on behalf of Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala (Punjab), can be categorized as an excellent beginning because not much literature on Swami Vivekananda is

available in Punjab. This booklet encapsules the much-needed information about the life and teachings of Swamiji, a leader of humanity and at the same time the servant of God in all beings. Written in simple and forceful language, this booklet, though primarily meant for the youth, can be read with profit by Punjabis in all age groups. It may be mentioned that Swamiji had great reverence for the Sikh Gurus.

The biography, under review, gives a vivid account of Swamiji's childhood, student days, renunciation, association with his Master Sri Ramakrishna, travels within the country, visits to the West, establishment of the Belur Math, etc. It also includes remarks of prominent persons about him.

Swami Vivekananda had in him all the qualities of leadership which were discernible from his very boyhood. He had said, 'I shall be a Sannyasi or a Raja (King).' Sannyasi he became, with a royal bearing. Generally, it is difficult to write a biography for it is to be based on bare facts and not on flights of imagination. The author has not only gathered painstakingly significant facts relating to Swamiji, but also artistically laid brick over brick like a skillful architect leaving no gaps. She also introduces the reader to the Great Master, Sri Ramakrishna. This biography therefore fills a gap in the Punjabi literature and is a welcome addition to the literature meant for youth. In publishing this biography, Bhasha Vibhag has made a good beginning and it will be highly profitable if *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, or at least some of Swamiji's prominent works like *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Raja Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga* are also rendered into Punjabi. Efforts should also be made to make this biography available to a large number of children and youth through inclusion in curriculum, circulation through libraries of schools and colleges and through Panchayats.

J. S. Ananda
New Delhi

**ĀTMABODHA OF ŚRĪ ŚAṂKARA
BHAGAVATPĀDA WITH 'ARTHA-PRAKĀŚINĪ'
commentary in Sanskrit; by Harshanandapuri; publ. Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, 560 019; 1996; pp. 40; Rs. 5/-.**

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, the great philosopher-sage, wrote his profound and brilliant commentaries on the *Prasthāna-traya*—the three foundational texts of the Vedānta philosophy, viz. the Upanishads, the *Brahma-Sūtras*, and the *Gītā*, to firmly establish on a rational basis the Advaita

system among the philosophers and scholars. He also wrote several auxiliary works to propagate the salient features and practical spiritual and realizational aspects of the philosophy among the people in a lucid and simple, and non-technical and directly appealing language. Such works are known as *Prakaraṇa Granthas*, and among them are the *Upadeśa-sāhasrī*, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, the present work under review and others. *Ātmabodha*, as the name indicates, teaches the real nature of one's Self (Atman) and its identity with Brahman, the Universal Self, the Infinite Spiritual Reality, the causes that obstruct this knowledge, and how to overcome them and realize the Truth.

Swami Harshanandaji, the President of the Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, has been doing laudable service by writing brief tracts in clear, simple language for popularizing the essentials of the Hindu religio-philosophic works and topics as well as on practical problems affecting the society and the youth. He has published a number of attractive and low-priced pocket-size and small booklets in Sanskrit-English on the *Yoga-Sūtras*, *Bhakti-Sūtras*, *Puruṣa-Sūkta*, *Karma-Yoga-Sūtras* (based on Swami Vivekananda's *Karma-Yoga*), etc., and a useful *Dictionary of Advaita Vedānta*. He has also composed in Sanskrit charming *Stotras* (Hymns) relating to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

Besides all these, Harshanandaji's outstanding works are his Sanskrit commentaries on the *Śāṇḍilya Bhakti-Sūtras* and *Karma-Yoga-Sūtras* (his own original), and on the present work on *Ātmabodha*. It is a very important subsidiary work of Ācārya Śaṅkara which expounds within a brief span of 68 ślokas (verses of 2 lines) the salient features of Advaita and the realization of the identity of Atman and Brahman. Swami Harshanandaji's commentary in simple, elegant Sanskrit does justice to its title *Artha-prakāśinī*, which signifies that it elucidates the meaning and the ideas involved in the profound and pithy verses of the original text. What is more, he follows the traditional style of Sanskrit commentaries and raising doubts and objections clears them to bring out the significance of the ideas involved in the text. The commentary is scholarly and yet simple and easily understandable with ordinary knowledge of Sanskrit.

The printing and get up are good and the booklet is priced very cheap.

Swami Mukhyanandaji
Belur Math